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Books by Edwin Lanham

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SAILORS DON'T CARE
THE WIND BLEW WEST
BANNER AT DAYBREAK

BANNER
AT DAYBREAK

By Edwin Lanham

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

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LANHAM
BANNER AT DAYBREAK

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FIRST EDITION

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Banner at Daybreak

Banner at Daybreak

BOOK ONE

I

SPRING had come again to Texas, and Olivia Hall could not remember a time when the season had been more beautiful. Perhaps, years ago, when they had driven in the hug-me-tight along the river road, among the shifting shadows of pecan trees, but had it been the spring then, or was it her memory of it that was beautiful? For she had been only eighteen that spring when Ross went away, four months before the flood.

Now again the sycamore trees were green beyond the hedge; the violets were clustered in their beds below her, and by bending over as she rocked, Olivia could see the soft blue mounds of them among green leaves. The air all day was like early morning when the sun has just warmed the dew away, the sky was blue with hardly any clouds, and the grass was green on the lawn. But when there are fewer springs they should be perfect; when a woman reaches the age of counting the springs to come she must linger in the spring that is here. Olivia Hall was barely fifty years old, but it seemed to her that since eighteen she had lived in the presence of death; she had waited for it.

Every morning Olivia sat in her rocking chair on the piazza of the old house her mother's father had built in 1880; she sat looking out at the quiet street where she had played in childhood, where she had strolled beneath a summer parasol on Sunday afternoons, where life had begun for her and on which life had passed her by. The street had changed little in fifty years. The trees were taller, and their branches spread farther over the

street, bending to trail their leaves along the privet hedge in a maidenly caress. Across the way there was a Georgian brick house built only a few years ago before the depression began, but the old yellow house with its galleries, its gables, and its terraced lawn, which her grandfather had built in 1880, was the same. The street could not change its character while the gabled house stood there like a dominant old man, its all-seeing windows looking down upon the street as severely as a school-master. Now it needed painting — months ago she had spoken to Amon Hall about it — and during the years the Virginia creeper had climbed farther along its walls until it hung in a nested canopy above the piazza. But these changes were gradual and hardly noticed in the passing years ; today a tintype of the house when it was new, when it stood bare and bright-faced on the open ground, seemed unfamiliar.

Once there had been tracks along the street for the mule-drawn streetcar whose leisurely trips to the courthouse square had been a Victorian ornament of the town, like cast-iron stags on the lawns of little use, but the tracks had been torn up twenty years ago and now there were buses which travelled rapidly along the street. And there were apartment buildings in the town, boom-built structures where one could hear noises through the walls from the adjoining apartments as in a servants' house. There was no grace in living like that. Yes, there had been many changes, but they did not affect the old house on the terraced lawn, where time had altered little. Of course once there had been fresh milk to separate and skim in the morning, milk from the Jersey cows her father had kept stabled in the back lot, or what had been the back lot then, where Clayton climbed the mulberry tree and where he raised popcorn that one summer. The cows had trampled on it, breaking the stalks of the corn which Clay had planted from seed bought with his own money. *You should sue your grandfather, Clay, you've got a good case,* Mark Hall had said to his son, but there was no levity in Amon Hall. *Clay should have taken more care,* he had said, *Clay should have seen to it that the cows kept out of his corn.* And that winter they had popped the corn in the wire popper before

an open fire in the library. It had been Clayton's contribution and he was proud of it and he had forgotten all about the cows. Now there were no more cows. She remembered Amon Hall's anger when the town passed an ordinance prohibiting the pasturing of milch cows within the town limits. Although the town's most distinguished citizen and a former United State Senator, Amon Hall had been unable to block passage of the ordinance and Clay had taken the cows to the ranch on Briar Creek, leading them behind the buggy. And now even the back lot was gone ; on it had been built a small frame grocery store from which Amon accepted groceries in payment of the rent. And even the mulberry tree had been cut down, the mulberry tree that Clay had climbed to eat the ripe purple berries — of course they all had worms in them and she had tried to make him let them alone — the mulberry tree that Clay had fallen out of one summer. He had come running to the house, not crying yet. He had come running to Olivia in the kitchen, to be taken in her arms in the kitchen, to bring again the warm ache of love to her heart. Clayton had known that his arm was broken and while they were waiting for the doctor, while tear-drops splashed upon the paper from the tip of his nose, he had taken a pencil and drawn a picture of his arm with a great bend in the middle of it. She had the drawing now, put away with the other childish scrawls, the cartoons of the Kaiser copied from the war editions, the later efforts to complete a picture. Mark Hall had hurried home with Amon, and while the doctor was setting Clay's arm, Mark had talked about the drawing, had praised it, to distract his son's attention, but Amon, striding up and down in the library had only said : *He's been told time and time again not to climb that tree.* But Olivia knew that Amon had been proud of Clay's bravery, and later he had asked to see the drawing. And if Clay had been her son, if she had been a mother then, she could not have loved him more.

It was not so much that the town had changed as that she and Amon Hall were unchanged, while time slipped by as rhythmically as the creaking of the rockers of her chair. They lived as before in the gabled house, only the two of them now, and

Amon worked in the office he had occupied for forty years in the limestone bank building opposite the courthouse. There were newer, better buildings — one was eight stories high — but Amon preferred the old office with its leather-backed chairs and green carpet, and as before he walked the mile to town in the morning and the mile home again at night. Now of course there were many days when he did not go to the office at all, and at eighty-three he should retire altogether, Olivia thought. But he still had the bearing of a much younger man ; there was still black in his hair, which was short and stiff like the gray muzzle of an old hound. He still kept close account of his affairs, with the energy of youth, and today he was in the library interminably going over papers while waiting until time to start for the ranch to oversee the de-horning of his Hereford steers that afternoon.

The whistle startled Olivia. Usually she was watching for the postman, but today she had not seen him and the shrill whistle made her gasp. He came through an opening in the hedge and walked along a path his feet had worn across the lawn. Olivia rose and went to meet him, frowning, but repressing her impulse to speak again about his walking on the grass.

"Letter here from Clay, Miss Hall," he said.

"From Clay ?" She took it. "How do you know ? What does he say, Tom ?"

"I see it's from France, anyhow," the postman said, laughing. "I reckon it's from Clay, all right."

Olivia returned to the rocking chair, the fringed hem of her purple gown trailing along the boards of the piazza. The postmark was Paris. She turned the letter over in her hands, smiling, settling herself before opening it.

Dear Aunt Olivia, Now he was planning to go away to the south of France to paint. Her eyes swept along the page, swiftly to save a phrase, to preserve untasted some of the flavor for re-reading. It had rained so much in Paris. He would stay away a month, perhaps longer . . .

"What came in the mail, Olivia ?" Amon Hall stood by the door, his head bent forward as he looked at her. The sunlight

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fell on his stiff gray hair, speckled his large pink nose. He walked forward slowly, his shoes of soft leather creaking.

"A letter from Clay, Papa. Do you want to hear it? Shall I read it to you?"

"Does he say anything about coming home?"

"No . . . But he sounds homesick, a little."

"It's time he came back to Texas." Amon sat down in a chair beside Olivia, stretching out his long legs. His knees were knobs under the striped cloth. "How long has it been now?"

"About four years, Papa."

"That boy ought to come home."

"He's going to the south of France," Olivia said softly. "He's painting very hard, he says."

Amon Hall grunted and rubbed one finger across the bristles of his moustache. "Has he sold any pictures yet?" He shot the question at her, his thick eyebrows lifting away from his keen bright eyes.

"Well, Papa, there's a depression."

"Depression? Why, I got my start in a depression, Olivia. I was only a young man when Jay Cooke's closed their doors in 1873, when this whole country was brought to a standstill. But that didn't deter me. I came bag and baggage to Texas. I hung up my shingle and I went to work. I helped to build the Texas and Pacific Railroad. I went into the cattle business. I got elected to the legislature, and all by the time I was Clay's age, or not much older. Why, the depression was the beginning of my career."

"If people haven't any money to buy pictures they can't very well be sold, Papa," Olivia said.

"Clay's got no business being an artist anyhow." Amon leaned forward, his long fingers clutching his knees. "A man has to take whatever opportunity offers."

"I think Clay shows a very fine talent," Olivia said firmly.

"Oh, nonsense, Olivia," Amon stood up, hands clasped behind his back. "That boy's just shiftless. — I tell you, I don't know what's wrong. None of my offspring ever amounted to

anything. — I tell you, one thing I can't abide is shiftlessness, carelessness. There's no excuse for it." He began to stride up and down in front of Olivia, long deliberate paces on the shadow-barred boards of the piazza. "I could use Clay here. He would be a big help to me. I'm getting to be an old man, Olivia. I'm eighty-three years old."

"You seem to get along all right," Olivia said dryly, courageously.

"I could use Clay to manage the ranch," Amon said with his stubborn manner of pretending not to hear what did not please him. "He could take over the management of the furniture factory, too, and if he had only studied law — I tell you, Olivia, that boy has wasted enough of his time."

"Papa." Olivia's cheeks were flushed ; her throat was pink down to the high-necked guimpe she wore. "Papa, I don't think Clay will ever manage your properties."

"What's that? What's that you say?"

She turned away from his sharp eyes.

"Clay wants to be an artist and he's going to be an artist," Olivia said, breathing faster as her resistance strengthened.

"Oh, he'll come home. Yes, he'll come home. His money won't last forever."

"Clay will always have money," Olivia said. "I'm sure of it."

"Olivia!" His sharp voice compelled her glance. "Olivia, don't you send him any money, do you hear? Don't you ever do it."

"Why, Papa . . ."

"I mean that. Clay's got to come home, I tell you. If he don't come of his own accord he'll come when his money runs out. And I don't want you to send him any, Olivia."

"Papa, why do you talk like that?" she said weakly. "Now you know Clay will never manage your properties. He's not cut out for that, Papa. Clay's an artist."

"Nonsense." Amon Hall walked three paces, returned again toward her. "Nonsense, Olivia."

"Well, you wait and see then."

Amon looked at her closely, then turned his back, suddenly shouted : "Clemmy !"

Olivia's rocking chair resumed its restive creaking. She held one hand at her breast to match the pressure of her sigh.

"Clemmy, open the garage doors," Amon called, and she heard the Negro's soft frightened answer in the distance.

"Papa, don't yell at Clemmy like that."

"I've got to make him hear me, ain't I ?"

"Poor old man, you scare him near to death."

"It won't do him any harm," Amon strode to the door, then turned to face her. "I'm going on to the ranch, Olivia, and when you write to Clay I want you to tell him to come home, you hear ? I want him to come home right away."

He slammed the door as he entered the house, and took his hat from deer antlers fixed on a plaque against the wall. He went out a side door and across a porch to the garage. The old Negro was pushing back the sliding doors, bent over, a bandanna drooping from the hip pocket of his overalls. The sun shone on his bald brown scalp ; his motions were brittle and jerky.

"All ready fer you, Sen'tor," he said. "Is it got plenty gas ?"

"I reckon there's enough." Amon got into the tarnished old car and jammed his foot on the starter. "Now get back out of the way, Clemmy. Stand clear now. You be careful."

"Yas, Sen'tor. Go ahaid."

Amon shoved the gear raspingly into reverse, let out the clutch, and the car bounded backward. The engine stalled and he kicked the starter with his heel, impatient, blood beating at his temples. With an effort at restraint he handled the gears with more care, but in shifting to second he forced the operation and there came a harrowing screech of metal. He had never mastered anything mechanical. Clay was a good driver, he remembered, and if Clay were there how satisfying would be these trips to the ranch. In fifty years he had learned how to raise cattle ; he could teach Clay. It would be pleasant to visit the ranch and know that the details of its management were the duty of another, his grandson. If only by the legacy of his experience he could continue his life in Clay, at the bar as he

had wanted, and in politics ; at ranching, as still was possible. An old man needed to give something of himself to the next generation ; his whole being yearned for it, seeking always the life's goal of completion, beyond which there need be no further effort, no further thinking.

Fifty years ago it had been a long journey by horse and buggy to Briar Creek, to the spreading acres he had selected when he first came to Rutherford on a stage coach in 1876. Then he had looked out at bright green fields, unfenced, in perfumed sunlight after a rain. Later he had bought the land and fenced it ; for fifty years he had fattened cattle on the sage grass, first scrubby longhorns, lean of flank and fleet as deer, later bred with Herefords ; and now on the plain between the hills there were only red-coated, white-faced Hereford cattle, a registered herd. Twice his bulls had won blue ribbons at the Fort Worth stock show.

He remembered how the weary stage ride from Fort Worth to Rutherford had been magically shortened when the Texas and Pacific Railroad at length built westward, and now it was abridged again by good roads, an automobile. He had made the trip to the ranch in less than forty minutes on some occasions, following the concrete highway, built by regiments of unemployed, that passed within three miles of Briar Creek. It did not adhere to the line of the original road, and the landmarks along the way now were unfamiliar, seen from a different angle. The panorama of the countryside seemed to have been changed by the deviation of the road, a visible expression of the change that he had witnessed gradually in fifty years, from the time when fences had been built across the road, forcing the stage-coach to detour, when herds of longhorned cattle had grazed in the open, when yonder beyond the pale blue hills on the sea-like prairie there had been raiding Indians and farther to the west the limitless herds of buffalo. The telephone, the automobile, the airplane, the radio — all these things had come in his lifetime, all these things had become familiar to him, but how much easier was the adjustment to external change than to changing

thought, changing expression. To Amon Hall advance in science and in industry was not seen as a possibility of release of mankind from burden but as a dissipating influence of the old rigidity, the stern morals and hardy spirit of his own times. In his son it had been evident; in Clay again it was apparent.

Amon Hall turned off the highway upon a narrow road that had once been the stagecoach route, followed it up a grade, and came at last to the valley of Briar Creek, looking down from a hilltop on the dark green line of trees along the creek bottoms, the blue-gray grass of the plain, and off to the left the brilliant green of a field of wheat, near the ranch-house under the pecan trees.

From the piazza of the ranch-house Dennis Coleman had been watching the distant hill, waiting for the dark form of the automobile to appear against the milky blue sky, and when he saw it he nodded his head and spat into the milkweed that fringed the steps.

"Yonder's the Senator," he said slowly. "Melvin, you'd best git them horses saddled."

Dennis Coleman was twenty years younger than Amon Hall, but he looked older. His hair was white, and his moustache was white except for a brown fringe of tobacco-stain above his lips. His shoulders were stooped, as if set in an iron brace.

"Pop, you gonna let me ride in the round-up?" Clinton turned his freckled face toward his father, twisting his torso as he sat on the edge of the porch with his bare feet dangling.

"I reckon so, son. Yes, we need your help. Run help Melvin saddle them horses."

Clinton ran after his brother, coming up with him at the gate to the corral.

"I'm goin' to ride too, Melvin."

"Did Pop say so?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't you run yo' hourse. You know what the Senator says about that. If he sees you at it he'll give Pop hell."

"I'll be keerful."

Melvin went about catching the horses, and when Amon Hall drove down the lane toward the house Clinton ran after the car.

"Where's your father, boy?" Amon called.

"Yonder on the porch, Sen'tor."

Amon Hall walked toward the piazza where Coleman was waiting for him, with a rocking chair drawn forward, a nasal "Howdy, Senator" of greeting. Amon sat down heavily, taking off his hat.

"Everything's ready, Senator," Coleman said. "The horses are saddled. I figured we might take that herd in the south pasture today and leave the rest for later."

"How many head are there in the south pasture, Coleman?"

"Well, let's see . . ." Coleman scratched his chin and gazed out across the prairie.

Clinton turned his head eagerly. "Three hunerd and twenty-one, Pop; twenty-two counting that big red cow that calved last week, but she's in the side pasture now."

"That's right, son. Three hunerd and twenty-one, then."

"Seems like Clinton knows more about the ranch than you do, Coleman," Amon Hall said.

"He's a right smart lad, Senator," Coleman said. "Lately I've had the misery in my belly again. I ain't been around much."

"You haven't got your head full of oil wells again, have you?" Amon asked with a brief, hard chuckle.

"No, Senator," Coleman said mildly. "I reckon I learned my lesson. I reckon I'll stick to what grows on top of the land and let alone what's inside it."

Amon Hall stood up. "If we plan to round that herd up before sundown let's get at it. There's only three of us."

"Four, Senator. Clinty will ride too." Coleman glanced at his son. "Boy, run hold the Senator's horse for him."

When Amon Hall had mounted the gentle bay mare he gazed out toward the distant hills, saying: "Clinty, do you think you and Melvin can ride to the other end of the pasture and start them this way from the water tank? Coleman, you

and I will ride along the back fence and clear them out of the mesquite."

"All right, Senator," Coleman said, and turned to Melvin, who had just ridden up. "Be quick about it, boys, but don't run your horses."

Amon Hall and Coleman rode on slowly. They turned to the east after they had passed through the pasture gate and entered the trailing mesquite, which grew thickly along the barbed wire fence. Amon ducked his tall head so that the branches would not strike his hat to the ground. The sharp prongs hidden among the slender leaves caught at his trousers and scraped along his legs, pricking his flesh. It was hot in the grove, for the thick growth of trees shut off the plains breeze, and perspiration broke out on the old man's forehead and trickled down his neck. The tickling sensation was uncomfortable, and he tied a handkerchief around his throat to absorb the moisture.

Occasionally they came upon a steer lying in the shade, and Coleman shouted until it started off ahead of them. Before long they had ten head preceding them toward the open. Once the path descended sharply from a small mound, where the underbrush was thick, then swerved to run parallel to the fence, a yard or so from it. At the foot of the mound a small gully cut across the path. Coleman's horse leaped over it, but Amon reined in his bay mare.

"What's this, Coleman? Come here."

"Yes, Senator?" Coleman halted his horse and turned, one hand on the cantle of his saddle.

"I thought you rode the fences this week."

"We did, Senator. Melvin and me both."

"Look at that."

Coleman's eyes followed Amon's pointing finger; he saw that the two bottom strands of barbed wire were broken and lay in the tall grass. There was room between the bottom of the gully and the lowest intact wire for a full-grown steer to squeeze through into the corn field beyond.

"Well I swan," Coleman said. "That must of just hap-

pened, Senator. Melvin rode this part of the fence yesterday, while I was hoeing suckers out of the corn."

The heat had made Amon's face red ; his hat was a close, hot band that constricted his head.

"You've got to do better than that, Coleman," he said with a burst of temper. "Those steers could have gutted themselves on corn. That's no way to run a ranch."

Coleman rode his roan horse nearer to the fence and looked over into the corn field.

"I don't see no critters in there, Senator."

"Well, let's move on then, before we lose those steers in the brush." Amon pushed his heel hard into the fat flank of the bay mare and the animal bounded forward, cleared the gully with a yard to spare, and crashed into the thickest branches of a mesquite tree that overhung the path, Amon pulled furiously on the reins, jerking the mare's head back. She rose on her hind legs, grinding at the bit, dry brush snapping under her hoofs.

"Come on, Coleman," Amon cried. "What the hell !" His hat had been pushed back on his head and there was a thin line of red across his cheek where a thorn had scratched him.

Coleman cantered ahead. The cattle had taken advantage of the pause to settle down in the shade of the thicket, but they scrambled to their feet as Coleman bore down upon them, and crashed head down through the brush.

"Don't hurry them in this heat," Amon called. "They'll lose all the fat they got on 'em."

Coleman held his horse to a walk, his head bent. Mesquite leaves brushed across his hat and slapped against his face. His hand that held the reins trembled and blood burned his face.

A few minutes later they were on the open prairie again and the cattle were trailing up the gentle roll of a hill ahead of them toward the feeding troughs, three rough log structures outlined starkly against the dazzling blue of the sky. Coleman saw several dark red figures grouped in the scanty shade of a tree to the right and went to round them in. He drove them toward

the hilltop and when he reached the summit he found Amon Hall bending from the saddle to examine one of the bins.

"Why hasn't this been fixed, Coleman?" he asked. The boards had rotted and fallen away so that the bleak ground showed through the bottom of the trough. "It's been broken all winter."

"We ain't never got around to it, Senator. We do all we can."

Amon turned the mare away in silence, and they started the cattle down the hill toward an old wagon road a half mile away which wound from the gate leading to the ranch yard and corral across the flat valley, skirted a deep ravine, and then climbed over a rise of land a mile away to disappear from sight. The water tank was on the other side of the rise. Amon strained his eyes in that direction, and saw a faint puff of dust, then tiny dark dots straggling into view, outlined against stationary clouds heaped one upon another in lavender-shadowed mounds.

"I reckon they got the rest of the herd," Coleman said. "We got fifty-six here."

"They're bringing them too fast," Amon said. "Look at the dust they're kicking up. They've got young calves with them, too, ain't they, Coleman?"

"They're big strong calves by now, Senator."

Amon grunted, glancing at Coleman. Now with the cool plains wind in his face he regretted his anger in the mesquite. After a moment he said: "You know, barbed wire is a curse. I introduced it here myself and I can say so. — Yes, my ranch had the first barbed wire in Paladora County, Coleman."

"I helped to string it up, Senator."

"Yes, so you did. You and your father. But you were just a boy then. — You never were the cattleman your father was."

"Maybe not." Coleman took out his corncob pipe and turned sideways in his saddle to relax, resting the weight of his body on one foot, while the other swung free of the stirrup. The herd was grazing along the slope.

"If you'd kept those ideas of striking oil out of your head, though, you'd of done better."

"I reckon I made a mistake," Coleman said slowly. "Yes, I reckon I did."

The other herd now had rounded the end of the ravine and was spread out over the wagon road, but one young steer had circled the wrong side and stood looking across the twenty-foot gap. It lowed once, pawed the ground. Clinton had seen the steer and was coming around the ravine after it at full gallop. His pinto pony, a trained cowhorse, was running high, with his head pulled back by the boy's firm grip on the reins. His forelegs rose in long jumps and the strong muscles of his chest stood out in relief through his sleek brown and white hide. The steer saw the approaching horse and waited for an instant, then turned and bolted along the bank of the ravine, its red back undulating with frantic exertion. Clinton eased somewhat on the bridle and the pinto leaped ahead. Gradually he came even with the steer's hindquarters as the animal raced through the thin growth of sumac lining the sides of the ravine.

"He's riding him too close. He'll turn him into that ravine," Amon said angrily. "There's no call to run him like that."

As Clinton swung ahead of the steer to head it off the yearling braced its front legs and slid to a standstill in the loose shale. Clinton reined the pinto sharply and swung him about, facing the steer. The frightened yearling gazed at the herd across the ravine and then, as the pinto pony bore down upon it, gathered its feet beneath its trembling body and launched itself forward in a desperate attempt to clear the twenty-foot gap. Coleman with a sinking heart saw the steer's white face rise upwards with its spring, then drop suddenly and disappear into the ravine. Amon gripped the pommel of his saddle, but he did not speak for a moment. They watched Clinton dismount and walk to the edge of the ravine.

"The young fool," Amon said. Bubbles formed at the corners of his mouth. "Killing a fine young yearling like that!" He rammed his heels into the mare's flanks and raced forward.

The tails of his coat blew out behind him and his baggy trousers were fattenied with wind. Coleman spurred his horse to a gallop.

When they reached the ravine Clinton had already scrambled down through the shale and was standing on the sandy bed of the ravine.

"He ain't hurt a-tall," he called. "He hit t'other side of the gully and slid down."

The steer stood against the side of the ravine, head down, tail between its legs. It was covered with dust which it was licking from its nose with a long gray tongue.

"Drive him up out of there, Clint," Coleman said. "Hurry now." He turned to Amon. "You can see he ain't hurt, Senator. That's soft sand down yonder."

Amon did not reply. He was attempting to mount the bay mare, which was whisking her hindquarters about so that he was having difficulty getting his foot in the stirrup. Coleman caught the mare's bridle and held it near the bit and Amon swung himself stiffly into the saddle. He gathered up the reins without a word and rode away. Melvin approached his father, his long sunburned face serious.

"The Senator is shore mad, Pop," he said. "It ain't Clinton's fault. He can't handle a horse with as strong a mouth as that paint's got. He shouldn't of rode him."

"I told him he could ride the paint, Melvin," Coleman said.

The yearling steer came up a narrow path from the ravine and ran to join the herd. Clinton climbed the opposite bank and remounted, then rode around the end of the ravine to Melvin.

"I told you not to run 'em," Melvin said. "The Senator is plenty mad. Don't let him see that paint now, neither. Look at him." The pinto pony's neck and shoulders were splattered with foam, and frothy bubbles clung to the bit and blew in and out of the pony's nostrils as it breathed.

"You'll break his wind ridin' him like that in the sun," Melvin said petulantly. "Now you go ahead and open the corral gate."

Clinton galloped away, the spotted pony bright against the dark red color of the herd. They came to the pasture gate and the cattle crowded through it. Their hoofs clattered on the road, which was hard beneath a thin layer of dust, and the cattle set up a constant lowing. The herd followed the road as it descended through fragrant dogwood which lined the creek, then crossed the creek bed and climbed the rise of the opposite bank into the open area before the ranch yard. The red, dust-covered backs formed a close mass as the cattle struggled up the bank with their horns and occasionally a pink nose jutting up.

Clinton had ridden his horse well away from the corral gate and waited to turn the herd through the opening. Already the advance guard had reached the gate and was crowding about it. The first steer, a huge brindle animal, braced its legs for a moment before entering, but the pressure from behind forced it onward. More cattle scrambled after, escaping the shouts from behind. Some of them had been forced too far to one side, so that they were to the left of and behind the gate, which had only been opened to a right-angled position instead of being drawn back flush with the fence. They pushed against the gate in a wild effort to rejoin the rest of the herd, and slowly it gave way before them and swung back, the joint effort of several tons of muscle pushing it shut in the faces of the rest of the herd which were coming up to mill about the entrance. Then the gate slammed shut altogether and there were over three hundred cattle closely packed against the fence. Coleman stood up in his stirrups.

"Git back," he shouted to his sons. "Git back and leave room to ease off so we can open the gate again."

Melvin and Clinton held their horses back, but Amon Hall, who had not heard and was unaware that the gate was no longer open, kept pressing on, shouting from time to time and striking at the shaggy red rumps with a stick he had found in the creek-bed. The cattle pushed harder against the fence as Amon continued to urge them on, then the outer fringe gave way before the pressure that returned to it from the center. The milling mass of pink noses and shaggy red ears seemed to find an ob-

jective and the herd broke and ran wildly for the cool trees of the creek. With raised tails flagging their escape they bolted across the open ground and slid down the steep bank of the creek, bursting through the crackling brush. In a few minutes they would be spread along the creek bottoms up to the boundary fence, over half a mile away, and it would take at least an hour to round them up again.

Amon Hall rode toward Coleman, sitting stiffly in his saddle, both hands gripped on the pommel. The wind blew the brim of his hat away from his face. His eyes were narrowed and his lips were set in a firm line in his flushed face.

"This is a hell of a way to run a ranch!" he cried. "Why wasn't that gate open?"

"It was, Senator, but them cattle pushed it shut."

"They wouldn't have pushed it shut if it had been opened right."

"I couldn't open it all the way, Sen'tor," Clinton said. His round face was screwed up and the sun gleamed on his tow hair. "I ain't got the strength to lift it over that there rough place." He pointed to a rise in the rocky ground just in the path of the gate.

"That's no excuse," Amon swung down from the bay mare and straightened one stiff leg with a kick. "You can't run a ranch if you leave it to boys." He turned on his heel and strode toward the sedan. His hands were still clenched and the veins stood out like fat blue worms. He jerked open the door of the car and climbed in behind the steering wheel, bending his long legs to place. He put his foot on the starter and the engine roared, but he did not drive away. Instead he throttled the motor and leaned out, calling: "Coleman!"

"Yes, Senator?" Coleman set his roan horse at a trot, halted beside the automobile, looking down at Amon.

"Coleman, your father and I ran this ranch together. I don't forget that, but you've got a responsibility to me. You're working for me and you've got a responsibility to me. I pay you your keep to look after this ranch and you share like and like with me in farming that wheat. But if that takes up

so much of your time that you can't pay attention to the cattle we'll have to give up farming. I'll turn that land back into pasturage."

The gears screamed as Amon put the car in low speed, and the car leaped forward and sputtered toward the gate leading to the main road. Coleman silently gazed after it and Amon bent forward over the steering wheel, staring at the road, thinking that in business matters a man had to be strict ; in business matters a man had to be careful and hard and not confuse his affairs with charity. It had been charity when he took Coleman in to run the ranch. The man was a fool. He had been raised on the ranch, had worked there with his father. And then, when the McClesky well came in at Ranger, when oil poured out of the plains on that October in 1917, when all the speculative world had turned to Texas, Coleman had sold the share in the Briar Creek ranch which his father had bought fifty years ago, sold his share and gone west to the oil fields. And five years later, penniless, he had returned to Rutherford, a widower with two children, and Amon had allowed him to return to the ranch, to the house where his first son had been born, where his father had died. Dennis Coleman was shiftless, Amon thought ; he was patient and willing, but he was shiftless. He needed guidance. He needed someone to watch over and direct him, to tell him what to do. The feed-trough had been unrepaired all winter, the broken fence might not have been discovered for weeks, had Amon not seen it.

The afternoon sun shone full in Amon's face as he drove rapidly into the west, keeping well to the right of the road. Light glittered painfully on the radiator cap ; his silver-rimmed spectacles reflected sunlight. He drove fast, bent forward over the steering wheel. He could only see clearly for two hundred yards ahead, but he knew every turn of the road and as he followed it instinctively, his foot jammed on the accelerator, he thought of the unrepaired feed-trough, the broken wire. He remembered Coleman setting off to the oil fields and he remembered Mark Hall, his only son, secretly, blindly, investing money in a wildcat well. There had been a drought in

those years before oil was struck and past the Briar Creek ranch a weary procession of covered wagons from the parched west had trailed in daily hundreds, stopping at the windmill and the tank to water their stock. And on the ranch the grass was burned to the roots ; the crops were sterile. All these people, and Coleman too, had turned toward the oil fields in their despair ; some had become rich. And Mark Hall too had plunged in oil, not listening to Amon. *Let other people invest their money, Mark. It's for the lawyer to salvage the investment and charge a big fee for it.* But Mark would not listen. Quietly, secretly, he had drilled a well near Desdemona, and struck salt water. And then Coleman had returned, penniless, from the oil fields. *Yes, Coleman I'll take you back.* It had been in Amon's study in the old gabled house. *I'll take you back, but you're not my partner now, you know. I'm doing this as a favor to you, because of your father. I'll pay you thirty dollars a month and half the crops you raise.* And Coleman, with his hat in his hand, had said *I'm obliged, Senator. I'll do the best I know how.*

By the time Amon reached Rutherford his head ached from the strain of looking into the sun, and as he drove along the shaded street toward the rambling yellow house he was seeking an outlet for his anger, he was storing an explosive charge. He stopped the car with groaning brakes at the carriage block by the chipped statue of a Negro boy with hitching ring in outstretched hand. Olivia was on the porch, in her rocking chair. Amon strode up the walk, stumbled on the steps.

"Olivia, I'm not going to stock that ranch next year."

"What's that, Papa?"

"I'm not going to put a single head of cattle on that ranch next year, I tell you." He went along the porch toward her. His hands were trembling ; his eyes were red-rimmed.

"Papa, what's wrong ? Sit down, Papa." Olivia came toward him, her hands fluttering at her breast.

"I tell you, Olivia, you can't run a ranch that way. Nothing is done right. I tell you, the fence is down and the feed-troughs are broken and a fine young yearling nearly got killed."

"Papa, you're as red as a beet. You come inside out of the sun. Come on, now. You mustn't let yourself get worked up this way. You're eighty-three years old."

"Those Colemans are no good, Olivia. I tell you, charity doesn't pay. I never should have taken them back."

Olivia's hand was on his arm. She drew him slowly toward the door.

"I do my part by them, Olivia. They ought to do their part by me."

Olivia led him to the study, a cool room now with a faint breeze moving the curtains at the windows. The even tone of the calfskin law books was restful.

"You mustn't overdo it, Papa. Here, sit down." Olivia turned his swivel chair for him. "If you're not careful you're going to have a stroke some day. Now sit down, please. I'll fix you a glass of cool lemonade."

Amon sank into the chair, his legs stretched out, and Olivia slipped silently out of the room. Amon's knees were weak and his hands were still shaking ; his face was feverishly hot. But now he began to perspire ; he breathed a deep sigh. With his neck resting on the back of the chair, his face raised to the ceiling, he closed his eyes. He was seated so when Olivia returned and seeing him cried, "Papa !"

He opened his eyes. "I'm all right, Olivia. Just resting."

"Papa, you shouldn't overdo it. Now I want you to stay away from the ranch for a while. Forget about it altogether."

"Somebody has to look after it, Olivia." He glanced at her keenly, his bushy eyebrows lowering.

"Drink this lemonade then. I spiked it a little, Papa."

"Yes, all right."

"Drink it, now."

Amon raised the glass to his lips and Olivia stood watching him. He was breathing easily now, and the blood had receded from his face. But with his chin out-thrust to drink without spilling the lemonade, with his hand still unsteady as it held the glass, he seemed much older. Now he was pale and gray ; he looked his eighty-three years.

"Papa," Olivia said slowly, "what makes you so angry is that Clay is just as strong-minded as you are. Isn't that so?"

II

RAIN beat on the translucent glass of the skylight, crushed upon it the leaves of an acacia tree which swept the roof of the *pavillon*, and washed in a stream down the slope of the skylight. The leaves moved in the water like sea-anemone and shone a brilliant green through the glass with a sort of cosmic radiance in the sunless morning. The beat of raindrops filled the studio with a cavernous roar and Clayton Hall, in bed on the narrow sleeping balcony high under the roof, at length awakened.

He saw first the wash of water on the surface of the plate glass, in furrowed design like miniature waves, and the green of the leaves, clear and bright where they touched the glass and fading to dark black forms above. He had the illusion of looking through glass into the depths of the sea and for a little time he watched the water and the moving leaves.

From the railed balcony Clay looked down on the one large room of the little house below him, the barrel-shaped stove, four feet high, the bookcase with a small plaster cast of Michael Angelo's *l'Esclave* upon it, and the heavy studio easel. He turned his eyes from the canvas on the easel and pressed his head hard into the dampness of the pillow, humid with the clammy air of Paris in the rain. He lay a moment in utter relaxation, then pushed himself up and sat on the edge of the bed, feeling with his feet for his crushed felt slippers.

As he turned into the studio at the foot of the flight of narrow steps the canvas on the easel met his eyes. He frowned and went to stand before it, knotting the cord of his dressing gown around him. The colors of the painting were cold, instead of glowing and intense as he had wanted. Staring at the painting, he knew that he had attempted a subject beyond his development and he was discouraged. The idea was good, and he remembered the night at the Grand Sporting Club when he had been persuaded to paint a prize fight subject. A clever Spanish light-

weight had been matched against an American quadroon in the feature bout, and the swift action of the fight, the weaving, dusky bodies, the tall figure of the Englishman and the black anxiety of the Negro trainer were impressed on Clay's memory. The trainer weighed two hundred pounds and as he crouched behind the ropes in the quadroon's corner he ducked and feinted, waved his powerful fists. His eyes were strained wide, his pink mouth opened and shut spasmodically with each blow struck, and perspiration streamed down his fat blue-black cheeks. Against this ponderous, primitive figure Clay had balanced the tall thin Englishman, a slave bracelet on his bony wrist sparkling in the arc-lights, his pinched face as eager as the Negro's, his open mouth sucking in exultant gulps of air between rigid lips.

Whenever Clay attended the fights at the small club in a rambling building far out by the Porte Saint Denis the Englishman was there, at the same ringside seat. He was known to the announcer, to the shouting gallery, and to the regular fighters, and he was popular in proportion to the money he put up in prizes. When a fight was going slowly the announcer would often shout between rounds : "Prime de deux cent francs — au gagnant," and gesture to the Englishman. The next round would be swift and bitter, and if there was blood the Englishman would stand up, leaning forward with one hand on the projecting canvas of the ring. On very bloody fights he had paid as much as a thousand francs in additional *primes*.

All of this Clay had tried to put into his painting, but he had failed. There was nothing sadistic in the intent face of the Englishman he had painted. The man's whole existence was not compressed into a transcendent moment of shining eyeballs, quivering lips and tense nervous hands as he looked at the drip of blood on the glaring white canvas. And the painted figure of the Negro second opposite him held nothing of the devoted anxiety for his fighter in which the prize and the Englishman's rewards were forgotten as he studied the action in the ring.

Clay took the canvas from the easel and held it in his hands, looking for a last unhappy moment at the static figures in unsure composition, then he turned it to the wall. His foot knocked

against a small high-heeled wooden sandal, enamelled crimson, and he leaned over to pick it up, glancing around the studio. Across a chair a flowered chiffon nightgown had been flung, its skirt draping to the floor. Clay picked it up and put it and the sandal in an armoire under the balcony where Arlette kept her clothes, then with a sigh he crossed the room to the box-like alcove in which were the wash-basin and the *garde-manger*, a screened compartment projecting from the wall of the house into the damp air. It contained a package of stale butter and some boiled milk in a tin casserole, covered with a chipped Quimper plate. Clay removed the plate and looked a moment at the thin blue-white color of the milk, and disgusted with the color he emptied the casserole into the wash-basin. He returned to the studio and took a bottle of cognac from the bookcase, where it had been concealed by the plaster statue. He poured some of the brandy in a sticky glass and drank it without water while looking at the statue. It had been left in the studio by an art student who had crossed on the boat from America with him four years before, and with whom he had shared a model for a few weeks, before Clay went on a bicycle tour along the Loire valley to Orléans. He disliked the statue, but he left it prominently displayed on the bookcase because the plaster glowed white against Burgundy curtains when the sun shone through the skylight.

Clay heard the crunch of feet on the gravel path and with the glass poised at his lips turned toward the door. The *pavillon* stood in a garden in the rear of a six-story house of mottled smoky stone, and the approach to it was through a gate at the right of the concierge's room and along a gravel path beside the house. The upper part of the door was the same type of corrugated glass as the skylight. From the distance forms were blurred and nearly indistinguishable, but close against the glass were more clearly seen. It was not Arlette, and Clay frowned as he watched the figure of a man approach the door. He recognized Paul Barthelot's face against the glass and when the man knocked lightly he opened the door. The Frenchman's eyes turned to the glass in Clay's hand. Barthelot wore a shapeless cap, the faded buff visor pulled low over his eyes. His thick hands hung at

his sides, his wrists protruding from the short sleeves of his jacket. Clay looked at the face of the man who had been prize fighter and Negro trainer and tall Englishman by turns for his painting, then stepped aside, holding the door wide. Barthelot's face was red and freckled. His eyes were narrow lines in his face, as if compressed to slits by the upward pressure of his high, broad cheekbones. His nose was mashed flat above his thick red lips and when he took off his cap his sandy hair grew down on his forehead nearly as low as the visor had been pulled. He looked toward the empty easel and Clay shut the door.

"I won't need you, Barthelot," Clay said. "I've finished the picture."

Barthelot turned his broad, expressionless face to Clay and Clay repeated in his careful French, "It's finished now."

"I came here today — from half across Paris," Barthelot said, his Adam's apple rising and falling as he talked. "You didn't tell me that."

"Yes, I know," Clay said quickly. "I'll pay you the forty francs."

"Don't you want me to pose?"

"No, the picture's finished." Clay's voice was impatient. He felt the man's small eyes upon him as he went to the bookcase and put down the empty glass.

"But you'll paint something else, no? — Another picture, yes?" Barthelot's lips hardly moved as he talked and his eyes watched Clay's face.

"Not now," Clay said. "See here, Barthelot, whenever I need you I'll send for you. I'll keep you in mind. Where do you live?"

"Hôtel des Trois Arbres, Rue de la Gaité."

Clay scrawled the address on a sheet of paper, thinking that Barthelot's cap and sweater, his high-waisted trousers and wasp-waisted jacket buttoned over a scarf wrapped tight around his neck belonged with the Rue de la Gaité. On the fringe of Montparnasse, the street had once been an Apache district, with police bureaus at either end, in view of each other. He had read in George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* that in the old

days there had been vicious fights in the street, with the combatants bottled up by the police stations, until at length a *poste* had been established midway in the Rue de la Gaité and gradually the street had become a cheap but not sinister neighborhood, with shops and *bistros*, and a motion picture theatre on a court which Clay sometimes attended.

Clay's coat was draped across a chair. He went to it and took his wallet from an inside pocket. The bills rustled and the pastel colors of thousand franc notes were set off by the black leather. Clay took out four ten franc notes and turning, saw Barthelot's gaze fixed on the wallet. He stood with his feet wide apart, facing Clay.

"When will you want me to come again, do you suppose?" the Frenchman asked. His spatulate fingers closed on the bills.

"I can't say. I'll send for you. I'll send you a *pneumatique*."

"I need the work, you understand. I'm not rich. I have to eat." Barthelot's French was careful and slow, as if he were addressing a child, and he moved the poised thumb and forefinger of his right hand toward his open lips, saying "Manger, manger."

Clay made no reply, and he heard the Frenchman mutter under his breath, "Pas riche, moi, pas riche du tout."

Clay walked past him and opened the door, and saw the sheen of a green umbrella in the rain, reflecting the same penetrant glow as the leaves of the acacia tree. The sound of Arlette's heels on the gravel walk was muted and tuneful.

"I want to earn some money," Barthelot said. He too was looking at Arlette, and he expelled air with a sibilant sound through puckered lips and rocked back on his heels. His hands were thrust deep in the pockets of his coat. They both remained silent as the girl hurried toward the *pavillon*. She did not look up until she had nearly reached Clay, then she raised eager, possessive eyes and her lips drew back from her large teeth in an intimate, planned smile. She handed the umbrella to Clay and went into the house, carrying a package. She walked stiffly past Barthelot without glancing at him.

"You Americans are rich," Barthelot said, looking over his shoulder toward Arlette. "You could pay me to pose all day, every day."

"If I need you I'll send a pneumatique to your hotel," Clay said, "now allez."

Barthelot thrust his underlip forward, his square chin rising.

"Allez vous en," Clay said angrily, and as he moved to shut the door the Frenchman blocked it with his foot. Clay saw the rising resentment in Barthelot's piggish eyes and drew a deep breath. Then he heard the quick light tap of Arlette's heels, the drum call of her partisanship.

"Clye, what does he want? Go on, you. Get out of here. Back to the abattoir with you, you hear!" The words poured from her lips fluid as the rain, rapid as the beat of raindrops. "Gredin, fripouille. You imbecile, you mackerel!" Clay could not follow her idiomatic French. Her face was flushed and her heels beat on the floor. Her sharp nose was pointed contemptuously at the Frenchman. She rode the crest of her rage like a strong ship, her hands the slatting sails, her words the whistle of the wind, and Barthelot backed away from her, speechless, toward the door. He stepped across the stone threshold, drawing his shoulders together against the rain, and looked steadily at Arlette, then he shrugged suddenly, movingly, as if he had dislodged the impact of all her words, and turned away. His feet clattered on the gravel.

"Zut, alors," Arlette cried, and slammed the door. She turned to Clay, her face pink, her lips moist at the corners of her mouth, and flung her arms around his neck. She pressed against him, her body possessive in each contact with him, her lips raised to his. Now was the climax of her emotion.

"What do you think I brought you for breakfast?" she asked after a moment. . . "Oysters!" She went to get the package from the table and opened it.

"Oysters for breakfast?" Clay looked at the pale green color of the *huitres portugaises* lying in a heap on a paper plate.

"That's chic, isn't it? Don't you think?"

"Very chic."

"The old woman on the corner — by the café, you know — she looked so sad today, and I bought her oysters. Her husband is a *mutilé de la guerre* and her son has lost his job at the factory, she said." Arlette went to a cupboard and returned with forks and two Quimper plates.

"Some white wine, Clye?"

He shook his head. "What time is it, Arlette?"

"Three o'clock, perhaps. Why? Have you a rendez-vous?"

"No."

"Then why do you care for the time?" She stood with the plates in her hand, looking down at him. "You have a rendez-vous, isn't that it?"

"I have to pay the rent, that's all," Clay said. "It's due today."

She sat down across the table from him and in silence cut a lemon in half. In repose her face was sharp, the corners of her mouth drawn in as if by purse strings. Her face still was flushed and she was warmly relaxed like a puppy after play.

"After that," Clay said, chewing the stringy body of an oyster, "I think I'll go to the baths."

"Won't you paint today?"

He looked at a stack of primed canvases leaning against the wall, at the heavy scaffold of the easel.

"Let me pose for you, Clye."

"No." He looked a moment into her green eyes. "I'm going to pay the rent and go to the baths and walk a little."

"Walk in the rain?"

"Why not?"

Arlette spread her hands, and her shoulders moved in a nearly imperceptible shrug.

"I don't feel like painting," Clay said, frowning at the rough yellow back-canvas of the prize fight picture. "Perhaps I'll stop in the Colorossi and sketch."

"I'll pose for you, if you want to do croquis."

"No. — Thank you very much." Clay stood up.

"I'll walk with you to pay the rent, Clye, and carry my umbrella for you," Arlette said. "Don't you like the oysters?"

"For breakfast, Arlette, they chew too much, like a cow's cud."

"Then what would you like?" She got up from the table and followed him to the wash-basin. "I'll get some brioche, Clye. I'll make you some coffee and you can have brioche and conserve. Do you want a small omelette?"

"No, thank you." Clay took out his shaving mug and began to work up a lather.

"Mon ami, I don't know what to do with you. You are very hard to please."

"But I don't want *anything*, Arlette. I'm easy to please. I just want to be let alone today. You think I'm difficult because I don't want everything you offer. Offer less and maybe I'll want more. Let me ask for it. Don't you understand?"

"I understand that you are méchant and not philosophique."

Clay laughed and said: "I only want to breathe with my own lungs," and Arlette left him to climb the stairs at the rear of the studio and make the bed on the balcony.

Curtains of heavy mulberry reps fell from the ceiling at each end of the balcony twenty feet to the floor. Fastened by rings to a long pole they could be drawn to screen the balcony and the other end of the atelier. As Clay shaved he heard her heels on the floor of the balcony, echoing in the studio, and occasionally in the mirror saw the reflection of her face as she looked around the folds of the curtain at him. For a month now she had lived in the studio with Clay. For a month she had awakened him and prepared his breakfast and gone with him to lunch and dinner, had accompanied him to cafés and bars and posed for him. For a month she had clung to him and planned their days together, even the hours and the minutes.

As Clay was tying his necktie Arlette came down from the balcony and stood behind him. He could see the crown of her dark red head over his shoulder in the mirror. When he turned at length he stood a moment looking at her, at her eyes like bottle-glass, her high-bridged nose and tight mouth.

"Smile a little, Arlette," he said in a casual, withdrawn manner and went to the armoire to get his coat. He took a

sketch-book from a cabinet under the stairs and put it in the pocket of his trench coat.

"I'll walk with you, Clye."

"No."

"To carry the umbrella."

"No."

"Yes." There were angry tears in Arlette's eyes and her fingers fumbled with the buttons of her green cloth coat.

"I'll meet you later, Arlette," Clay said. "Listen, this is an affair of business. Once in three months I go to Madame Bria's and pay the rent and we have a cup of tea together." He put his hand on the doorknob. "I'll meet you later, toward six o'clock."

Clay went out into the rain. Except for the fall of water it was quiet in the garden and as he walked along the gravel path Clay listened to the different tone of the raindrops, soft on the grass, dripping strongly from the leaves of trees, splattering on the gravel steadily. He walked around the corner of the house, past the concierge's room, and went through a spiked gate to the Rue d'Alésia. Across the street was a cheap café where he sometimes lunched ; a few yards from it was a *boucherie hippophagique*, with a gilded horse's head high above the door. Clay had bought meat there for weeks before he had learned that the horse's head meant that only horsemeat was sold by the butcher. And later he had understood Arlette better when she had refused to eat in the café across the street, with its two tables on the sidewalk behind a scanty boxed hedge. When one ate horsemeat one was very poor ; to a girl who had undoubtedly marketed with her mother always in a *boucherie hippophagique*, had pounded the meat to soften the cartilages, the odd sweet taste of it would be like swallowing back one's nausea.

The old oyster woman in her gray smock and black knitted cap smiled and spoke to Clay as he turned past her stand into the narrow Rue de Vanves, and the *patronne* of the wine shop peered out at him through the misty glass. In three years he had become well known to the neighborhood. The only American there, he knew that his movements were watched, speculated

upon, discussed, and that the fat concierge with her wide loose mouth and bulbous eyes who was so ingratiating when she brought his mail, or swept out his studio, or undertook *petites commissions* for him, was welcome in the shops for what she could tell of *l'Américain*, that he was a social asset as dear to her as the *pourboires* he gave her.

But in three years Clay had grown no closer to the people among whom he lived than the day he first moved there, when he had gone from shop to shop buying pots and pans and soap and brooms for the studio which was the first home he had ever had to himself, the first place where he could be really free and alone. One other time, when he was fifteen, Clay had lived in a tent on a ranch in West Texas which his grandfather had bought, to watch over eight hundred head of cattle until the time should come to sell them. In spite of the loneliness he had been happy in the tent, able to forget the rigid routine of a more social life, to cook his food and eat it when he was hungry, to saddle his horse and ride when he pleased, to go to bed and rise when he wanted. When he moved into the studio on the Rue d'Alésia, isolated among the acacia leaves of the garden, it was like returning to the tent of his boyhood, recapturing the first deeply felt sufficiency. On that first day — it was early spring and cold — he had bought coal at the little *bistrot* on the Rue de Vanves. He smiled and nodded now to the *patron*, who was standing in the doorway looking out into the rain. Behind him Clay saw the brief gleam of the zinc bar and the blackboard on the wall on which the prices were chalked up. He had bought *boulets* that first day, on the *patron's* advice, and an old man had brought the egg-shaped pellets of compressed coal dust to the studio in a bulky, grimy towsack. Coal dust was engrained in the old man's face ; his yellowish beard was streaked with it. His short body was bent and twisted from years of work and much red wine and he breathed always jerkily, asthmatically, as if he went through life, day and night, with a sack of coal never leaving his shoulders. He had dumped the *boulets* in a packing case Clay had made ready, and Clay at once had wanted to build a fire, but the old man had brought no kindling wood. He sent him

back then for several of the neatly-wired and circular packages of wood and stamped about the studio in the damp cold, waiting. An hour later the old man had not returned and Clay sent the concierge in search of him. When she brought him the wood she explained to him, with an expressive shrug and pursed lips that caused the wiry hairs at their corners to stand out like brush bristles, that *le vieux* had not brought the wood because Clay had not given him a *pourboire* when he delivered the coal.

"But I was waiting until he brought the wood," Clay said.
"Of course I was going to tip him."

He had gone to the *charbonnerie* then and left a two franc tip with the *patron*. After that the old man called on him once a month — not when bringing coal, but special gentle visits disassociated from his work — to ask Clay for cigarette butts. Clay would give him a glass of white wine and the box of cigarette stubs he had saved during the month for the old man to smoke in his pipe. Once he had painted the old man, resting, with his sack of coal beside him, and Clay felt now that it was the only good picture he had painted.

When Clay reached Madame Bria's house, on a dead-end street not far from the Avenue du Maine, and only a few blocks from the little house where Douanier Rousseau had painted and held his evenings of music, the brim of his hat was saturated and water dripped down upon his nose. Madame Bria exclaimed about his wetness and Clay, appraising the quality of her concern, remained in the hallway and did not enter the airless parlor with its thick rug and plush furniture and precise landscapes along the wall. He paid the rent and took her receipt and did not join her in a cup of tea. In the rain again, he walked down past the cemetery to the Boulevard du Montparnasse and stood on the corner in the leaden drizzle for a moment. There was an exhibition of Bracque's paintings at a gallery on the Rue de Seine and he looked at a bus approaching from the south on the Boulevard Raspail, hesitating. In the sombre light the houses along the boulevard and the dark puddles were toned in the warm browns and blacks and moving grays of Bracque, the colors set against each other with no feeling of mass in the rain.

Water dripped from the limp brim of his hat upon his hand and Clay set off briskly across the street. He turned down the Rue de la Grande Chaumière to the art school, and went along a musty corridor to a one-storied studio in the rear. He took a sketch-book from the pocket of his coat and settled down to do line drawings in the five minute poses. The model was a woman, too old to be a *poule*, as yet young enough to escape her probable destiny as attendant in a comfort station. She had lean drooping breasts, lumpy knees and thin legs, and very wide red hips. Clay sat with the sketch-book on his raised knees and drew torsos, exaggerating the globular buttocks, pinkly mottled, obscene and ludicrous as a baboon's and turned indecently toward the class as those of a baboon in a zoo. Time passed quickly in the concentration of working and an hour later when Clay left the school his nerves had relaxed. The rain had nearly stopped. He stood at the corner of the Carrefour Montparnasse for a moment, looking across at the empty tables on the *terrasse* of the Dôme, the dripping hedges in front of La Coupole, then he turned away and walked along the boulevard toward the Clôserie des Lilas. Just before reaching the café he turned in at an iron grille gate and went up a flight of stone steps to the entrance of the public bath. He came into a tiled corridor where silence seemed to overlay his ringing footsteps as damp air wraps to silence the dying tones of a bell. He stopped at a *guichet* and with the smell of antiseptic soap strong in his nostrils said "une douche" to the white-jacketed attendant and dropped a five franc note on the counter. He was given a ticket and went down narrow stairs to the basement showers, where another attendant provided him with soap and towel and ushered him into a tiny dressing room, beyond which was the shower.

Clay let the water beat on his forehead. His bare toes gripped the narrow slats of the floor boarding, beneath which the water rushed with a sucking sound to the drain. The small room was filled with the resonant roar of the shower, and his bare body shone through the water in diffused light that came from a square screened window high in the room. Clay was tall, and his wrists were thin and marked with round knobs of bone at the divisions

with the hands. His long fingers were spread at the knuckles, and his hands were laced with wiry, nervous tendons. They were an artist's hands, Clay thought, looking at them. If he worked hard, drank less, he might some day project on canvas the vivid pictures his mind framed. In ten more years . . . But now he knew he should get away to the country for a while. He must go away from Paris, and alone—to Avignon, Aix-en-Provence or to the Riviera, perhaps Marseilles. There was a town near Marseilles—Martigues. They called it the Venice of France and there were canals and boats and a restaurant where the food was excellent and parrots screamed from their perches overhead. It would be like a picture on an old-fashioned candy box, but Clay felt that was just what he wanted. Life would be uninvolved, with a saccharine simplicity that would take the taste of Paris out of his mouth like a strawberry lollipop. He reached back and turned off the water. In the dressing room he towelled himself vigorously, ceasing to think as the blood flushed to his skin and his muscles relaxed. His clothes were damp and warm and clung to his body when he put them on. He was glad to leave the humid air of the room, but the corridor too was breathless, and he ran up the stairs to the tiled upper floor.

It had stopped raining and the sun shone palely through diluted clouds which rose like smoke against the sky, their weight of water spent. The smooth cobbles glistened and the tires of passing automobiles whistled a tune of rising spirits, now that the rain was over. Clay turned into the *Clôserie des Lilas*, at the bar entrance. There was no one at the bar and he perched on one of the high stools, opposite the Catalonian bartender, Diego, who smiled and leaned across the counter to shake Clay's hand. There was a peasant warmth in his personality and his face always shone a little with the joy of a peasant who had come to Paris and found it more than he had hoped for. But Clay, ordering an ale, thought that he would rather enter a bar where he was not recognized and known by name, where he could enjoy the movement of Paris with the impressions of a newcomer. Diego's manner stamped Clay's four years in Montparnasse upon him like a whisky label. It was four years now since he had sat in

the library of his grandfather's galleried house in Texas and told him that he was going to Paris to study. Clay had a tight breathless feeling when he thought of his grandfather.

Clay, you're shiftless like your father was, Amon Hall had said. *You're happy-go-lucky and careless the same as he was. You're not an artist. You haven't got the background for it. You couldn't draw a thing like that.* He had pointed to an engraving of *The Stag at Bay* on the library wall, and the lines of the engraving now came into Clay's memory in a strange mental pattern with the whir of the lawnmower old Clemmy had been pushing along the flower border by the piazza. He remembered the dusty shelves of calfskin-bound volumes, and the Indian arrows in a frame above the mantel, with frayed moth-eaten feathers and warped shafts. They had been State exhibits in the trial for murder of two Indian chiefs long ago, and they had never had reality for Clay.

Diego, seeing Clay alone and silent at the bar, came toward him with the poker dice and sent them slithering along the polished wood. Twirling the leather bottle with a circular motion, he picked up the dice one by one with the inverted bottle, his broad peasant's hands moving with flawless rhythm, his white teeth shining against his nut-brown lips. They played for drinks. Clay rolled three queens on his first throw and passed the dice to Diego.

Clay remembered again the droning sound of the lawnmower. Clemmy Wells had worked for his family even before Clay's father was born. He had been a porter in the old Clayton & Lord House in Rutherford when Amon Hall first went to Texas as a young man. He must be nearly a hundred years old, Clay reflected. Even in the library, where he had sat with Amon Hall, it had been stifling that day. Although still spring, it was hot and the grass was turning yellow on the tips. Even in the study it had been hot, and Clemmy was pushing the lawnmower in the midday heat.

"Four kings," Diego cried, laughing. "Voyez."

"In one throw?"

"Oh, certainly."

"I wasn't looking," Clay said. "What are you drinking?" "What do you think? — Perhaps a Pernod."

"If you want to die young, yes."

Diego laughed again and Clay watched him pour water into the green liquid, watched it turn a creamy green.

"Like pus from a boil on Bacchus," Clay said. "That's what it looks like."

"Eh?" Diego raised one oily eyebrow and Clay shook his head and raised his glass.

Clemmy Wells had been the slave of Clay's great-grandfather before the Civil War, and he had worked in the hotel in Rutherford until it was wrecked. Now he still worked for his keep, for the corn bread and fat salt pork his shrivelled gums could manage.

Clay put his glass down hard on the bar, empty. "Make me a Bacardi cocktail, Diego." He thought now with a cold hard exultation that he at least had escaped where his father, his Aunt Olivia had failed. She had been in her rocking chair on the piazza that day while he was with his grandfather in the library. She had known what Amon Hall would say. He had always made decisions for her and his stiff, decisive phrases had been the pattern of her life. She had been waiting on the porch to say to him afterwards: *If you ever need money, Clay . . . Oh, I'll be all right, Aunt Olivia. . . Can't I help you pack? Be careful in France, Clay. It's a different world. Be careful in a world you don't know anything about. And if you ever need money, Clay . . .*

"Never mind the Bacardi, Diego," Clay said morosely. "Mix me a Pernod too."

III

BEYOND the Porte de Vanves, beyond the autobus terminal, beyond the walls of old Paris, was a settlement of huts and frame houses perched like cockroaches on nearly fluid mud. Boardwalks were laid along the sides of the street, against picket fences mud-encrusted and worn bare of paint. As Paul Barthelot

tramped along the walk, his feet striking the narrow planks at right angles, mud oozed up through the cracks, the makeshift walk sagged down into the watery earth, and the sibilance of the suction followed his footsteps like a muted echo. In passing through the city gate he had left Paris behind him. Now there were no street noises ; no rattle of trucks or steely ring of the ponderous hooves of draft horses on the cobbles, no nervous wails of automobile horns that were like hypodermic needles injecting frenzy into the movement of the streets. The sky was as gray as the houses, and the houses, some of which had been whitewashed not long ago, were gray as alley cats. There was an oppressive silence in the city of huts and mud, which looked like a flooded town from which the water had but recently receded.

It was no longer raining, but the air was raw and Barthelot had wound his muffler tightly about his throat, his turned-up coat collar buttoned over it. He looked down now at his pointed shoes, the leather scuffed and peeled, and at the mud swelling up through the cracks in the boards. He walked reluctantly along the street, not looking at the drab houses, the silent staring walls which brought to him a strong impress of stagnation and despair.

Midway down the block Barthelot turned slowly in at a gate, hunching his shoulders uneasily in the tight-fitting coat. He went along boards placed lengthwise to the door of a house, sheltered between two whitewashed ells giving on it as on a court. He looked at the gray film of whitewash over the meagre boards, at the planks laid across the mud, and his lips pressed tightly together. There were no trees, no bushes — there in the corner of the yard the neck of a broken bottle, projecting from the mud, caught the light. He hesitated a moment, then pushed open the door and went into the kitchen of the house. Opposite him was the wood-burning range, the sink and the *garde-manger*, and there an old woman stood, with leathery face, with hair like cobwebs through which her scalp showed pinkly. When she saw him her hands lifted to her hips, and her elbows turned out and forward until their points were directed sharply at him. "Well, so it's you, Paul."

Barthelot took off his cap and glanced from the corners of his eyes at a fat man seated at a table with a glass of red wine beside him. He wore a white undershirt and his heavy arms were bare, as white and flabby as a woman's, the only hair three long strands trailing from a vaccination scar.

"Hello, Jean," Barthelot said.

The fat man grunted, raising his eyes briefly from a copy of *l'Humanité*.

"So you have time to pay a little visit to your mother," the old woman at the stove said. Her lower jaw moved from side to side as she talked, as if it had slipped loose from its sockets. "Will you have a little glass — champagne, perhaps?"

"Zut, alors," the fat man said.

Barthelot sat down by the table, and in doing so his foot knocked against his brother's crutches under the table.

"And how is the Rue de la Gaité?" the old woman asked. "You enjoy yourself, I suppose, Paul? You eat *prix fixe* with wine included and eat biftek every night and have kirsch with your coffee, I suppose?"

"With forty francs a day you should buy new shoes," the fat brother said, looking at Barthelot's feet.

"I don't have forty francs a day any more," Barthelot said. His voice was choked and in him there rose the stifling resentment of family that belonged to adolescence, now warped and furious in him.

"So?" Jean Barthelot raised his head. The visor of his cap shaded his eyes but they glowed like phosphorous in the shadow.

"So you come home again, is that it, Paul?" the mother asked bitterly. "There's no more easy life now, so you come home. You want us to give you money, eh? You want us to feed you? Well, I'm your mother. Yes, you can eat here, but it will be poor man's meat, my son. It will be a Chateaubriand from the cordon bleu."

"You bring shame on your mother's gray head, Paul," Jean Barthelot said in a heavy, slow tone. "Here am I, *mutilé de la guerre*, a man with only one leg — I can do nothing. You should get a job like an honest working man."

"I worked," Paul said. "But today this American sent me away."

"That's not honest work, to stand naked for artists to paint. That's not your class, Paul. You stay in your class. You work with your class. That's where you belong."

"If I could get a fight . . ." Paul rubbed the knuckles of one hand against the palm of the other.

"Paul, you fought three times, and three times you were beaten. You are no boxer, brother. No, my friend, you must find real work, labor."

Madame Barthelot stood by the stove, her eyes turning first to Jean, then to Paul. She was a small neat figure—a woman in a Corot painting. The room too was neat. The tumblers in the cupboard, of thick glass, shone. The table was bleached and smooth from years of scrubbing ; there was no dust on the floor. The kitchen was that of a clean peasant house in the country, if there were not the mud to be seen through the window and the blank wall of the adjoining house, and if the boards of the wall did not creak apart rheumatically at the joinings under the thin layer of whitewash.

"Where would I find this work, do you suppose ?" Paul lifted his square chin ; his spatulate fingers twisted the visor of his cap. "A million men are also looking."

"True, work is hard to find. But you do not try, Paul. You want the easy life."

"You are strong, Paul," Madame Barthelot said, coming forward from the stove. "There's always something for a strong boy, digging streets, at the abattoir."

"The abattoir !" Paul flushed, staring at his mother.

"Why not the abattoir ?" Jean said quickly. "I would go to the abattoir, if I had two legs. Paul, these are very hard times for the working man, that is true, but there are some jobs for a strong man who can work with his hands."

"Now if I could only get a fight," Paul said.

"Your brother freezes through the winter in his little kiosk, selling newspapers," Madame Barthelot said. She brought a bottle and poured a little more wine in Jean's glass. She made

no move to put a glass in front of Paul, and after a moment he got up and slouched over to the cupboard. When he turned with a glass in his hand he found his mother looking at him steadily, the bottle held against her breast.

"This is only ordinary red wine, Paul," she said. "Not champagne."

"Perhaps it's Burgundy he wants," Jean said.

"No Burgundy here, Paul."

"I've had enough of it, Jean, you hear? I've had enough of it!" Paul's face was flushed. "I'm not begging for your wine Mother. I can buy wine for myself."

"And you can buy a bed for yourself, in a hotel," Jean said slowly. "Hôtel des Trois Arbres, Rue de la Gaité. That's very pretty. That's chic, that. That's *haut monde*."

"I gave up my room in the hotel," Paul said.

"Oh, indeed. So you're coming home to live now that your forty francs a day is gone. Is that it?"

"No."

"No?"

Paul tightened his muffler about his neck and buttoned his coat high, turning up the collar. Madame Barthelot stood against the wall, twisting her apron in her hands. Her dark eyes looked steadily at him; only her writhing hands betrayed her emotion.

"Now, Paul," she said. "Here, have a glass of wine. It's good Beaujolais."

"Keep your wine for Jean to drink, Mother. I don't need it. I'll buy my own wine." Paul pulled the visor of his buff-colored cap lower over his eyes. "I'll earn money, plenty of it."

"Bravo," Jean said. "Encore."

"And not at the abattoir," Paul said. "And I won't sell newspapers or dig up the streets. I'll have hundred franc notes, I tell you, to paste on my valise like the tourists did."

Jean made a spitting noise and Madame Barthelot said softly, "Paul, take a glass of red wine."

"Yes, let's drink to his success. Let's drink to the capitalist."

Paul stared steadily at his brother, then turned abruptly toward

the door and went out into the spongy air. When he had gone Madame Barthelot went past Jean without speaking and put Paul's glass in the cupboard where light was reflected from it upon a little scene of Mont Saint Michel painted on a seashell. Jean shrugged his shoulders and finished his glass of wine, then sighed and drew his soft fat forearm across his mouth.

IV

THE houses along the Rue de Vaugirard were blank dark walls turned on the glistening street. In the Jardin du Luxembourg on the right puddles of water were metallic glints in the dismal empty background of the park, which now had been locked for the night. A slight mist had come after the rain and the gray shape of the Senate building lost form and substance in it.

Their footsteps carried on a sort of conversation as they walked along the Rue de Vaugirard, Arlette's heel-taps quick and dominant, Clay's tread slower, deeper, occasionally blurred in splashing puddles. Clay tried to remain silent, not to listen to the vibrant, hurried monologue that had been unceasing since he had met Arlette at the bar of *La Coupole*, that had pursued him through dinner in a little restaurant on the Boulevard Raspail, and now continued as relentlessly as the sharp beat of her heels on the pavement.

"You are *soul*, Clye," she had said at once, and the brief crisp word, repeated throughout dinner, had been like too much pepper on his meat. "*Soul*, *soul*, *soul*," she had said. "Where have you been? Who were you with? Why did you keep me waiting so long — for two hours at *La Coupole*?"

Now as they turned the corner into the Rue de Tournon she was still talking, saying, "Who *were* you drinking with, Clye? Why don't you tell me?"

"I was alone, at the Clôserie des Lilas. I told you that."

"For two hours alone at the Clôserie? Oh, no, Clye. I am not so simple. I am not a peasant girl new from Brittany. I have been ten years in Paris, my friend, and I'm not so simple as that."

"I wanted to be alone, Arlette. Can't you understand that?"

Her hips swayed against him as she walked and she clutched his arm against her, turning her face up to him like a bright-eyed magpie, her lips parted. "Alone by yourself? Alone with Diego? Or alone with a woman, isn't that it, Clye? Some American woman, Clye? It's a woman from your country you want. Oh, I can see that." Her voice slurred to a lower tone. "Who is she? Blonde, Clye, or brunette? Tell me, what is she like? Is it someone I've seen? I don't care. . . ."

"Here's the *Trois de Coeurs*," Clay said abruptly. "Let's have a drink."

"But wait." They were standing at the entrance to the bar, beneath a sign in dim electric lights *Bar Américain*. Clay put his hand on the door handle and she clutched his arm. "Clye, tell me the truth. Do you want me to pull your pretty hair out and scratch your face like a Siamese cat? Have you seen a Siamese cat angry, Clye, when its eyes turn red? I'm like that too, and if I find this other woman, if I find it's true, I'll do that, I tell you."

Clay twisted his arm free and pushed open the door and they went with flushed faces and tight hard mouths into the barroom. A quick nervous voice called Clay's name and he saw Guy Hart seated on a high stool at the bar; opposite him, his sturdy figure balanced on his heels, his pudgy face shining with an impish smile, was Harry the barman, famous in Montparnasse for his cocktails and a carefree attitude that had led him from the prize ring through a succession of bars and *bistros*, *cafés* and jails.

"Clay, where have you been lately?" Guy Hart asked. "I haven't seen you in weeks."

"I've been working," Clay said. "This is Arlette, Guy."

Arlette sat down on a stool without speaking.

"I want a brandy and soda, Harry," Clay said. He felt Guy watching him and turned toward him. Guy's full lips were twisted in a smile and a crooked dimple, deep-cut in the muscles of his right cheek, came to view. "I'm sort of married now," Clay said.

"I wondered what had happened to you," Guy said. "You act married."

The *Trois de Coeurs* was a small bar, with curtained windows facing on the street, an interior door opening on the corridor of an adjoining small hotel. There were half a dozen tables, a bar the length of the room, and an upright piano in the far corner. The room was warmed by mulberry-shaded walls, matched by the curtains at the windows. The rich red color of the polished bar shone in the light and the brass handles of the beer taps gleamed brighter than the rows of glasses and bottles in the cupboards behind the bar. At one of the tables a dark-haired girl was sitting with a South American who lived in the hotel. She was one of the *poules* of the quarter, a girl with the strong body of a peasant, but with skin as white as an arsenic-eater's, burning black eyes and jet hair. Her shrill laugh was as unhuman as a hyena's wail, but indicating a sort of cruel, mystic amusement. Her name was Carmen and Clay had often seen her in the bars of Montparnasse late at night. Once she had posed for him and laughed in her hard bright way because he had painted a mole on her shoulder — exactly where it belonged, she had said. She was talking now, actively, to the South American, and Clay turned back to his brandy to find Arlette watching him with her eyes narrowed and her underlip protrusive.

"Oh Lord," Clay said. "Aren't you drinking?"

"Yes, I want a Bacardi."

"A cocktail still? After dinner?"

"Why not?"

"Harry, a Bacardi cocktail," Clay said.

"Shall I put a drop of Pernod in it?" Harry asked as he heaped ice in a shaker.

"Pernod?" Arlette said. "Yes, Pernod. Altogether Pernod, without any Bacardi." She leaned over the bar. "And very strong, Har-ree."

"I like this bar," Guy said. "It's far enough away from Montparnasse."

"I'm sick of Montparnasse too," Clay said. "But there's

something that holds you. It satisfies that awful loneliness, that damned adolescent loneliness. A man has to have a Montparnasse — or a woman."

"It's time for me to get away from Paris for a while," Guy said, and put out a casual hand for his brandy. "I've been here for three months this time and that's long enough. I'm going to the country for a while, maybe Avignon. What was the place you stayed at there, Clay?"

"Madame Boudin's. It's across the river at Villeneuve-les Avignon."

"I might go there, or to Toulon, or one of those little towns along the Côte des Maures. You'd better come along, Clay."

"Perhaps I will."

"What are you saying, Clye?" Arlette leaned forward, the glass of creamy green Pernod in her hand. "Talk French."

"He's going away on a trip," Clay said in French.

"And he wants you to go too, doesn't he?"

"You *do* understand English, don't you?"

"But it's true."

"He asked me to go." Clay shrugged his shoulders. "I said perhaps."

"I have to save money," Guy said. "I spend too much in Paris. And there's a long poem I want to get started on." He lifted his glass to his lips and took two deep swallows. "Do you sell any pictures, Clay?"

"No."

"Can you really paint? — I've never seen anything of yours."

"Haven't you heard about my artistic heritage?" Clay stood up, leaning against the bar. "My grandmother used to decorate china by hand. I understand she was quite the cultural center of Rutherford, Texas, back in eighteen eighty. . . Say, there's Gussie Norton."

A plump woman, bare-headed and with sleek red hair glistening from the moist air, came into the barroom, waving her hand: "Hello, Clay, hello, Guy. Buy me a drink, will you, I just lost my job."

"Again, Gussie?" Guy said. "What's the matter?"

"Too fat, they said. Hell, my voice hasn't cracked yet. Hello, Harry."

"How are you, Miss Norton."

"That's the last lousy nightclub I'll ever sing in. Jesus, Clay, I drunk up all my salary anyhow. It's too expensive to work." Gussie laughed, and her small eyes nearly went from sight in her round white cheeks. "Guy, to hell with France. I'm going back to America, as soon as I can get the fare home together. God, I suppose I'll have to sell my body to do it. If I could sell it by the pound I'd go first class on the *Île de France*."

Clay had not looked at Arlette and now he felt her nudging his arm, insistently. Glancing at her he saw no further evidence of anger, only curiosity, and now a bright social smile.

"This is Arlette, Gussie," he said.

"Oh, I think I've seen her around."

"Maybe, but not with me."

"I've seen her though." Gussie laughed and tapped Clay's shoulder lightly with her soft palm. "Clay, don't be a sucker."

"Clye, you said you would speak French," Arlette said.

"Yes," Clay said. "All right. Have another drink."

There were so few people in the bar that when the street door opened everyone looked up. A French couple had come in and stood just inside the door, hesitating. It was plain to see on entering the bar that business was not good and the trade had been given over to a small clique, the vultures of doom for a barroom. The waiter winked at Clay, saying: "Vatch me take dem over," and rushed forward with the wine list under his arm. The waiter was known as Tom the Bum. A sailor on the beach in Rotterdam, he had obtained a forged Dutch passport and worked his way to Paris, and one night in Montmartre in an all night restaurant he had met Harry. Tom's bony wrists protruded several inches below the cuffs of his white jacket. His hair grew in a black bush from his low forehead and in his pale face his eyes were black as a crow's, gleaming as he talked loudly so that all at the bar could hear him. "Dis is an American place

here," he said, the wine list still tucked under his arm. "It ain't cheap, you understand." He paused and the Frenchman looked up, his eyes bulging behind silver-rimmed spectacles.

"Now listen here," Tom said. "If you want to sit around and have a good time cheap you better buy a bottle of champagne maison. You take now most American jerks you got to pay two hundred, maybe three hundred francs a bottle for it." Tom grinned as the Frenchman licked his lips, then he leaned forward confidentially. "But here now we got a good champagne that only sets you back sixty francs." He nodded his head vigorously.

"Oui," the Frenchman said at once. "Oui, bring us that."

Tom turned away, the wine list still unopened in his hand, and walked to the bar with a crooked grin.

"Tom, how much does that champagne cost?" Clay asked.

"You hold me, didn't ya?" Tom grinned. "Sixty francs."

"How much, Harry?" asked Gussie.

"Oh, I don't know."

Gussie took the wine card and opened it. She laughed. "Twenty-five francs. Harry, give us a drink on the house or we'll call an agent."

"That guy's probably a shop owner with a two price shop, one price for the French and another for tourists," Harry said. "Tom just puts the reverse English on."

"We'll have that free drink anyhow," Gussie said, and Harry smiled and reached for the brandy bottle.

"Clyde, why did you say perhaps?" Arlette was gazing at him steadily. Harry had poured another Pernod for her.

"Oh it's nothing, Arlette. Just to be polite."

Arlette turned her head toward a burst of accordion music in the corner where the orchestra of two young Spaniards had begun to play. Carmen and the South American were dancing.

"You know, Clay, you ought to come south with me," Guy said. "There's plenty to paint along the Little Riviera. There are hill towns all along that coast. It's quaint enough for anybody."

"I'd like to go," Clay said.

"Where the hell are you going?" Gussie asked.

"Away from Paris," Guy said. "It costs too much here."

"Good idea, too," Gussie said. "I'm going back to America."

"Clye, you said you would speak French. What were they saying?"

"They were talking about the south of France — about how good the bouillabaisse is in Marseilles — nothing of importance."

"When you said perhaps, what did you mean? Do you mean you're going with him? Is that what you're thinking of?"

"No."

She pursed her lips, frowning, and Clay signalled to the barman for another drink.

"You would take someone else with you, is that it?" Arlette's fingers were clenched on the full swell of her glass; her body rested forward against the bar.

"Forget it, Arlette. Don't be méchante." Clay frowned. Guy Hart was watching them curiously, the dimple slashed deep in his round pink cheek as he smiled.

"It's you who are méchant, Clye," Arlette said in a sulky, plaintive tone, with a little sigh to express the universal suffering of women.

"Why don't you kick her pants, Clay," Gussie said, and laughed. Suddenly she left the bar and ran across the floor to the foyer, where the waiter was serving a drink to an *agent de police*. Her deep laugh rang out above the gasping accordion. The *agent's* white teeth showed beneath his moustache in a polite smile as Gussie caught his hand, then capped and dignified he came into the room with her and very seriously began to waltz, with a regular clock-like rotation and a mincing pause at the end of each *pas*. The short cape flapped from his shoulders and his face became pinker, almost the color of the ribbon which edged his cap and striped his trousers. Everyone was laughing and applauding, and a couple who had just come in stopped by the door to watch. Clay recognized the girl as Alice Rand and went to speak to her. He had not seen her in months. Her face was deeply sunburned up to the widow's peak of her black

hair, which made severe and serious a small face with pert features that otherwise would have had the quality of a gamin.

"It's good to see you again, Clay. You know Roger?"

"Of course." Clay shook Roger Baron's large soft hand and answered the Frenchman's slow, flaccid-lipped smile. Roger was a tall, heavy man with large features and high cheekbones that gave a strange, angular cast to the round soft face.

"Who's that with you, Clay?" Alice asked.

"Guy Hart and Gussie Norton."

"I know them. I mean the girl."

"Oh, that's Arlette."

"Something new?" Alice smiled.

"Not so new now," Clay said. "Where have you two been?"

"We're living in the south of France. We're just here for a few days. Roger has a play . . ."

"*La Femme Pouffante*," Roger said.

"The woman who what?"

"Pouffe — pouffer," Alice said, laughing. "It's about a woman who can't control herself in emotional crises, Clay. She rumbles, you know — pouffe. They have an automobile horn off-stage, you see. It's very amusing."

"It's going to be produced?"

"Yes, very soon."

"Congratulations, Roger." Clay leaned over and ceremoniously shook the Frenchman's limp hand.

"Why don't you come to the south of France, Clay?" Alice asked. "We live on the Côte des Maures, a few miles beyond Le Lavandou — toward Saint Tropez."

"Opposite one of the îles des Porquerolles, and the French ships sail by and shoot at it — boom," Roger said.

"Target practice," Alice said, and laughed. "Roger likes noise. . . . But seriously, Clay, there's a very good pension there and it's quiet and peaceful."

"Everyone seems to be leaving Paris," Clay said. "Guy is on his way to Avignon."

"Avignon?" Roger said. "That becomes hot very soon, and the dust, formidable!"

"Yes I know," Clay said. "But I like Avignon. . . I'll see you two later. What's the name of that town, Alice?"

"La Pramousel."

"I may turn up there some day," Clay said, and returned to the bar. Arlette met him with frigid eyes. Her lips were wet and there was perspiration on her forehead.

"Who was that, Clye?"

"And old friend of mine." He picked up his glass.

"Were you with her this afternoon, Clye? Is that the woman you were two hours with when you said you were drinking at the Clôserie?"

"I *was* at the Clôserie, Arlette."

She finished her drink and set the glass heavily on the bar. It tipped over and rolled on the bias in a close circle on the polished wood. Clay saw that there were angry tears in Arlette's eyes. Her underlip trembled.

"Har-ree, un Pernod," she cried. The barman come over to her, but Clay shook his head.

"You've had enough, Arlette," he said.

"So, you spend all day drinking with another woman, Clye, but I must be content with two drinks all the night, is that it?" She caught his arm, her fingers tightening on his wrist. "Clye, I want another Pernod."

"No."

She kicked his ankle, viciously, the point of her shoe striking a glancing blow on the ankle-bone. He stepped back from the bar.

"Why don't you slap the little bitch, Clay?" Gussie said.

"You're drunk, Arlette, but even drunk you can't do that," Clay said.

"Can't I? Why not?" She kicked him again, several quick hard blows on his aching shin, then looked up at him, rigid, facing him.

"That's enough," Clay said stiffly. "It's been a matter of convenience with us, Arlette. Now it's finished."

"Finished? Yes, it's finished. Do you think I'd stay any

more with you, Clye? No, I am leaving you. I'm leaving your atelier tonight."

"All right," Clay said. "Harry, l'addition."

She stared at him, then bent her head and suddenly began to weep, quietly, her lips quivering against her moist palm.

"How often does this happen, Clay?" Gussie asked.

"This is the last time." Clay paid the bill and turned to Arlette. When he put his hand on her arm she rose docilely and went with him to the door. Her head was erect and tears rolled down to the corners of her lips, smearing the rouge. There were no taxis in sight and they walked along the Rue de Tournon, in silence, to the Rue de Vaugirard. She walked slowly, pressing against him, her body softening with her mood to a limp and pitiful supplication not expressed in words. They found a taxi near the Odéon and Clay gave the address. They sat far apart and Arlette did not speak until they had turned into the Rue de Rennes and were following its length toward the smoky form of the Gare Montparnasse, then she murmured, "A matter of convenience, did you say, Clye?"

Clay did not answer. He took out a cigarette and lit it.

"Is that what it was to you, Clye, a matter of convenience?"

"Of course it was," Clay said, and they were silent until the taxi drew up in front of the spiked gate on the Rue d'Alésia. Clay told the chauffeur to wait and opened the gate. There was a trick of reaching through the bars and pulling a lever to open the gate without ringing for the concierge. Arlette walked ahead of him through the court and along the gravel path in the garden. There were no stars and he could not see her, but only heard the scuffing of her high heels on the walk. When he reached the *pavillon* she had taken out her keys and opened the door. She went ahead of him and pressed a button which turned on the bulbs in the chandelier overhead, of an intensity designed to simulate daylight. Clay crossed the room and sat down on the divan by the stove. He did not remove his hat.

"Clye." Arlette stood full in the light, looking at him. The tears had dried in spots on her cheeks. "Clye, here are your

keys." There was a slight catch in her voice and Clay looked away.

"Put them on the bookcase," he said.

He heard the faint metal clink, then Arlette's slow footsteps as she moved about the studio, from the armoire under the stairs to the table, up the steps to the sleeping balcony and down again. Her suitcase was open on the table and she packed her clothes in it very carefully, consuming time. On the bookcase opposite Clay was her portable phonograph. Looking at it, Clay remembered the nightclub in Montmartre early in the morning when he had met her. Spring was coming slowly to Paris and the nights were silken when it did not rain and velvet-like when it did. Clay had been drunk ; he had left Guy Hart in the Palermo and had wandered from bar to bar. Twice a woman taxi driver who knew him and had often driven him home had called to him, saying : "Come on, young man, Rue d'Alésia, isn't it ?" Then in a little *boîte* off the boulevard he had met Arlette. He had seen her frequently, for more than a year, in the cafés and bars of Montparnasse, and one night they had danced together at a *bal musette* in the Porte d'Italie quarter. That night they drank together and later went to her hotel on the Left Bank, both tipsy, and Clay with a bottle of cognac he had bought at a *bistrot*. At once Arlette had wound up the phonograph and Clay remembered the end of the record and the grinding drone of the needle afterwards like a situation in a bedroom farce. The next morning they left the hotel together and the *patronne* stopped Arlette in the hall, demanding the rent. She was a short fat woman with a round chin protruding like a knob on a gray tree trunk. Her eyes were cold and narrow in a face that could be a conciliatory and ingratiating mask but was truly revealed only when there was power to be shown and money to be demanded, when she was harsh and persistent as a ferret, relentless and obscene. She had made Clay hot with anger and later, breakfasting with Arlette, he had given her money to pay the rent and told her she could stay in his studio for a few days. That had been over a month ago.

"Clye." He glanced up and saw Arlette looking at him.
"Clye, I'm sorry."

Clay lit another cigarette, snapping the matchstick to the floor by the stove.

"Clye, why didn't you strike me?"

He unbuttoned his coat and took his wallet from an inner pocket. "Arlette, let's forget the whole thing, everything. Take this and pay your rent at a hotel."

She looked at the thousand franc note in his hand.

"It will keep you going for a while, until you find something to do," Clay said. "Or until you find somebody else."

"I don't want it."

Clay stood up and held out his hand. She shook her head and put both hands behind her back, raising her chin. After a moment's pause Clay walked over and put the bill on the end of the bookcase, by the door.

"It isn't your money I want, Clye," she said, and again he saw the tears in her eyes. He picked up her suitcase.

"Are you ready, Arlette?"

She turned abruptly away and went to the door.

"Wait," Clay said, as she put her hand on the doorknob, and her eyes turned quickly back to him. "Don't forget the money."

"You pay me off, Clye, is that it?"

"No, Arlette, I give you that as a friend."

"No, you pay me off. But I accept it. Yes, I accept it." She snatched up the note and crumpled it in her fist. "Yes, now I am paid off and you are no more responsible, Clye." She stuffed the note in her handbag and went out into the garden. Clay turned out the lights and followed her and she was already in the waiting taxicab when he reached the street.

"To the same hotel?" he asked.

"No. Oh, never. There's a little hotel on the Rue Vavin. I'll go there."

Clay gave the address and got into the taxi.

"Well," Arlette said brightly as the cab started away, "it's like going on a journey, don't you think, with my valise and with

you to see me off. Will you kiss me goodbye at the station?"

"Certainly, and I hope it will be a pleasant trip," he said in the light tone she had used.

"Oh, I think I know what I will see," Arlette said. "Others have made the same journey, some by slow train, some by rap-ide — they run on the same tracks."

The hotel Arlette had chosen, on the Rue Vavin, was just off the Boulevard du Montparnasse, in view of the neon lights of the cafés. Clay carried the suitcase into the lobby and Arlette arranged for a room.

"Clye, shall we have one more drink before you go — around the corner, in the Select?"

Clay shook his head and she paused a moment, looking at him, then held out her hand.

"Then goodbye, mon ami."

"Goodbye, Arlette." He took her hand and when she leaned forward he kissed her lips lightly, then stepped back when she pressed against him.

She raised her head ; her lips were parted. "Clye, I hate you," she cried, and kicked him suddenly, furiously, on the same shin. She ran to the staircase and turned, calling : "Je m'en fous," then ran rapidly up the steps and out of sight, her feet falling noiselessly on the carpeted stairs.

After a moment Clay laughed, reluctantly, and when he went out to the street he was still smiling. He passed by the brightly lighted cafés of the Boulevard du Montparnasse and walked along the dark Rue du Montparnasse toward the Rue de la Gaité. Now again he was in a district of lights ; not the flaming lights of Montparnasse, but the yellower lights, the noisier street, of the cheap French district, more intimate, more real, with its shops and *prix fixe* restaurants, its cinemas and *bistros*. Clay stopped in a *bistrot* near the end of the short street and, standing at the zinc-topped bar among a group of workingmen in corduroy trousers, ordered a cognac. He felt now a sense of enervation which was not unpleasant, enjoying this moment of stopping for a drink alone in a bar he had never entered before, among people he would not see again, and foretasting the peace

of returning alone to his studio after a month of stormy scenes and constant, inescapable companionship. He drank several glasses of cognac, and by the time he left the bar he was laughing and talking to the men there. One of them slapped his back and shook hands gravely, and with a hearty, "Bon soir, Messieurs-Dames," Clay reeled out into the Rue de la Gaité. He was joyously drunk and as he walked along the narrow gray Rue de Vanves he began to sing, loudly and tunelessly, to start the echoes bounding from the eaves like startled ravens in the night. The café on the corner of the Rue d'Alésia was still open and Clay stopped there for one more cognac. The smiling *patron* winked at him and put both hands to his head, shaking it dolorously. Clay laughed and mumbled, "Oui, c'est vrai," and stumbled out of the café, across the cobbled street, and along by the stone wall to the spiked gate. He opened it, falling against the bars, and circled the tall building to the garden. It took him a long time to fit the key to the keyhole and open the door. He turned on the lights, and the first thing he saw was the divan by the stove. At once he crossed the room and fell full-length upon it, his hands still in the pockets of his coat, his hat falling to the floor.

When Clay awakened his arms were cramped ; his breathing was choked. It was a long icy moment before he fully realized that his hands were held behind his back and a towel had been tied around his head, the knot tightly drawn at the base of his neck. He kicked out, and there came a great weight on his back and one arm was twisted painfully. Clay lay still. He could hear the sound of a man's quick deep breathing ; he felt cord being wound around his wrists, binding them together. He decided to lie quietly, to submit. His head was spinning and ached with sharp, severe twinges.

Next Clay felt clumsy hands going through his pockets, slipping under him ; he heard a voice, low-pitched and husky, say : "Tu n'as pas de bijoux, non ?" and then he knew that it was Paul Barthelot who held him, who had gagged him with his own towel. He struggled and a fist struck him a jarring blow at the base of his skull, for an instant stunning him, but still he was aware of the watch being drawn from his vest pocket, his

wallet being taken from his coat. Then the pressure left his back and he heard Barthelot's quick tread on the floor, across to the bookcase, back to the door, then the rapid crunch of his feet on the gravel path.

Clay began to struggle with his bonds. He sat upright and the light filtered palely through the towel to his eyes. Panting, he ceased his efforts now and then to allow a brief pause to his aching head. Finally the cord was loosened and he pulled one hand free, chafing the wrist. He jerked the towel from his head and stood up, blinking his eyes in the sudden glare of light and looking around him at the empty, silent studio. Now he realized why Barthelot had run to the bookcase before leaving. There Arlette's phonograph had been and he remembered now that they had taken only her suitcase to the hotel. Clay started to run toward the door, but knowing that it was useless to pursue, he walked unsteadily over to the bookcase and poured himself a drink from the brandy bottle. He remembered how Barthelot had eyed the wallet that afternoon when Clay had paid him. He had seen it stuffed with banknotes, before Clay paid the rent, before he had given Arlette a thousand francs. In the wallet Barthelot would find only a few hundred francs and Clay's *carte d'identité*, but the watch was valuable. It had been a gift from Amon Hall on Clay's twenty-first birthday. Clay left the studio, careful to lock the door, and as he walked along the gravel path to the gate he remembered that he had not closed it when he returned home alone. He remembered the clang of iron on the wall when he had thrown his weight against the gate in opening it.

He looked up and down the Rue d'Alésia for an *agent de police*, but the Plaisance quarter was not closely patrolled and he saw no one on the street. After a moment's indecision he crossed the Rue d'Alésia and started along the Rue de Vanves toward the commissariat of the quarter on the Rue Boyer-Barret. He was still drunk, and each pounding step on the pavement jarred his aching skull. He swayed from one side to the other of the sidewalk on the short walk of three blocks, and the lights of the police station when he turned the corner were filmy and

diffuse in explosive colored streaks to his eyes. He climbed the steps and walked across a floor worn gray as driftwood. The *agent* behind the desk looked at him with one eyebrow raised, and Clay put both his hands on the desk, leaning against it.

"Voleur," he said thickly. "Y'avait un voleur chez moi."

"What's that, Monsieur?"

"I've been robbed," Clay repeated.

"Robbed, Monsieur? Where does Monsieur live? In this quarter?"

"Rue d'Alésia, près de la Rue de Vanves."

"Attendez, Monsieur. Attendez une petite minute." The policeman stood up and very deliberately walked around the desk, past Clay, and went through a door at the back of the room. A moment later another man put his head out the door, quickly withdrew it. There was a brief pause and then the first *agent* returned to the doorway and beckoned to Clay.

"Par ici, Monsieur, s'il vous plaît."

Clay went into a small bare office. An officer was standing behind a desk, buttoning his tunic, shaking his shoulders to make the cape fall free.

"Well, Monsieur, what is your complaint?"

"I was robbed," Clay said. "A man broke into my studio, tied me up and stole my money and my watch and a phonograph."

"A phonograph?"

"Yes, a small one."

The lieutenant sat down in a straight chair behind the desk and drew a pad of paper and an ink-stand toward him. He tested the point of the pen on the tip of his finger.

"Now, Monsieur, your name please."

"It happened only a few minutes ago," Clay said. "He might still be caught. If you hurry—"

"We will find him, Monsieur. Your name, please?"

"Clayton Hall."

"Pardon?"

"Clayton. Say-ell-ah-eegrek-tay-o-n, Clayton. Ash-ah-ell-ell, Hall."

"Bien. You are American, Monsieur ?"

"Yes."

"Your papers, please."

"My papers ?"

"Your carte d'identité, Monsieur."

"It's gone," Clay said. "It was in my wallet. It was stolen."

"You have no papers at all ?"

"My passport."

"Very well."

"I haven't it with me."

The lieutenant leaned back, putting the tips of his fingers together before him. He pursed his lips and sharp hollows appeared in his ruddy cheeks.

"But listen," Clay said. "I've been robbed, I tell you. Must I show you my passport to tell you I've been robbed ? I've lived four years in this quarter, Monsieur."

"Four years ?" The lieutenant leaned forward and added a line to the writing on the pad. "When did this incident occur, Monsieur ?"

"Just a few minutes ago. I tell you, if you hurry you might catch him."

"Oh certainly, we will catch him. Suppose, Monsieur." He glanced at the pad at his elbow. "Monsieur 'All. Suppose you return tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning !"

"Yes, tomorrow morning Monsieur can tell us everything. You'll feel better tomorrow, don't you think ? Perhaps tomorrow you will forget all about it, don't you think ?"

"But look here," Clay said, flushing. "I'm not drunk."

"Oh certainly not, Monsieur. Not for a moment did I think that."

"And I know who did it," Clay said. "I recognized the man."

"Ah," the lieutenant leaned forward. "You know him ? You should have said so at once, Monsieur. Who is he ?"

"His name is Paul Barthelot. He was a model for me. I recognized his voice."

"Paul Barthelot," the lieutenant said, writing carefully on the pad, "and the address, Monsieur?"

"He lives on the Rue de la Gaité. Hôtel des Trois Arbres."

"Yes, I know that hotel. Well, that's better, Monsieur. We will call upon Monsieur Barthelot, and later we will send for you. This matter should be easily arranged."

"Is that all then?"

"For the moment that is all, yes. If Monsieur wishes I will have an agent accompany him to his home."

"No thank you," Clay said angrily, then added, "Monsieur the lieutenant is very kind."

The lieutenant stood up and clicked his heels together, and stood by the desk watching, with only the slightest suggestion of a smile turning the corners of his mouth like arrows up into his cheeks, as Clay went unsteadily across the bare, dusty floor and out into the street.

v

MADAME BERNARD's face was as faded and gray as the weathered sign fastened to the wall outside her window, on which was painted in chipped black letters *concierge*. From the window she could see the spiked iron gate, the smoky wall of rough concrete in which it was set, and the dull green of the hedge on the *terrasse* of the café across the street. She could see people passing, for perhaps fifty feet of sidewalk across the way, and she could see the gilded horse's head above the *boucherie hippophagique*. With her black knitted cap drawn down over her ears, with only a few wisps of iron-gray hair protruding, Madame Bernard would sit for hours at the window, knitting or darning socks for her son. Her routine was well-established. In the morning she prepared breakfast for Pierre and saw him off to the post office, where he sat all day behind a grilled window selling stamps. Next, while waiting for the postman, she cleaned her two small rooms and swept the areaway; later delivered the mail to those

who sometimes gave her *pourboires*. Then she would sit at her window until it was time to market, at the ten o'clock hour of gossip at the butcher's and the grocer's and in the wine shop at the corner.

At last after many days of rain and skies as drab in color as the loose-fitting gray smock that Madame Bernard wore black-belted at her waist, the afternoon sun was shining in a pale filter that touched only parts of the courtyard and left shadows vague in outline on the liverish walls. Madame Bernard sat at her window, knitting, and her dog Mitsou lay at her feet, sharp nose resting on one paw. Mitsou also was growing gray ; her senses were dulled and she was too weary even to drag her fat body into the block of sunshine on the floor. But when the iron gate clanked Mitsou raised her pointed papillon's nose and growled a warning. At a glance Madame Bernard recognized the man at the gate ; he was a member of the judiciary police who had called before to obtain routine information about tenants in the building for possible entries in the careful, guarded *dossiers* that might be filed under their names.

Madame Bernard dropped her knitting, straightened her cap, and went out into the sunshine with a smile nearly concealing the mole at the corner of her mouth. Mitsou followed at her heels and in the open at once sank to the pavement, head on paws.

“Bonjour, Madame.” The detective did not remove his gray felt hat. A cigarette in the corner of his mouth, depending at an angle great enough to burn his chin, was yellow ; the fingers of his right hand were ochre-stained by nicotine.

“Bonjour, Monsieur.”

“You have a young American staying here, Madame ?”

“Yes. Monsieur 'All. A fine young man, très gentil.”

The detective waved a hand lightly, took the cigarette from his mouth. “He has been here a long time ?”

“More than three years.”

“Tell me, what is he like ? What is his business ?”

“Artiste peintre, Monsieur. He paints pictures. One he did of the old man who carries coal for the charbonnier. You

would swear it was he in the body ; even the wrinkles on his face he painted, and the soot."

"Does he live alone, Madame ?"

"Alone ? No, there's a woman. I can't say much about her, Monsieur. She has lived here perhaps a month. Before that Monsieur 'All lived alone — well, there were *femmes de nuit*. Yes, sometimes, even often. I would see them go out in the morning, you know, and when I went to clean for Monsieur 'All I would wink at him and always he would — well, he was gentil. But this woman, she came to stay, bag and baggage, one morning. Monsieur 'All had not been home all night and when he returned in the morning he brought this mademoiselle. With us it has always been, 'Bonjour, Madame' — she would say that — and 'bonjour, *Mademoiselle*' I would say. Ah-hah, and she doesn't like it, I can tell you."

"A *femme de luxe*, perhaps ?" The detective asked, smiling.

"She thinks so, yes. But not at all, Monsieur. She might be a girl of the Quartier Plaisance, and if you ask me you would find a little yellow card in her pocketbook if you looked hard enough and if you were a detective." Madame Bernard laughed.

"And her name, Madame ?"

"Why, I don't know. There were no letters — nothing. And believe me, she did not make me her confidante."

The detective frowned. "A woman living in the house — A concierge should know her name."

"What would you have me do ?" Madame Bernard spread her hands. "But what has happened to Monsieur 'All ?"

"Isn't he at home ?"

"I don't know. I have not seen him leave this morning."

"Tell me, is this American a little —" the detective's index finger described circles above his ear — "like the rest."

"Oh, no." Madame Bernard laughed. "He's a serious young man, Monsieur. Yes, I can say that."

"He drinks a good deal, though ?"

"As to that — well. He is young, he has money. What would you expect ?"

The detective shrugged. "Now, Madame, last night, was there a disturbance? Were you awakened?"

"A disturbance? Why no." Madame Bernard's eyes were round; her mouth opened eagerly. "What do you mean, Monsieur?"

"It is nothing. Where does Monsieur 'All live?"

"But what disturbance do you speak of? What has happened?"

"Monsieur 'All lives in the garden?"

"Yes, in the pavillon."

"Good." The detective walked abruptly away; Madame Bernard ran after him.

"Is it serious, Monsieur? Was someone hurt? Has there been a murder?"

"As to that, who knows?" The detective shrugged. "If Madame does not see for herself there is nothing I can tell her."

"But I have only two eyes, Monsieur, and in this house one can come and go without calling the concierge. It is very simple to open the gate."

The detective walked ahead of her along the path under the acacia trees. Sunlight was reflected palely from the skylight of the studio and the leaves above it were a bright viridian. The detective paused before the door and lit another cigarette, then knocked briskly; paused a moment, then knocked again.

Clay turned his head from the canvas on the easel, frowning. He had been working on a landscape from watercolors he had made more than a year ago at a little town near Aix-en-Provence where he had lived for a few weeks. The picture he had painted was a contrast of cold, blue-gray hills with red-tiled houses and ochre roads and dusty green foliage. He had worked with intense concentration, by doing so to disassociate himself from the prison wall of trivial concerns which oppressed his immediate life, and the interruption recalled to him the memory of the night before as the noise of the knocking echoed in the high-ceilinged room.

"Who is it?"

"Someone to see you, Monsieur 'All," the concierge called.

"One minute then." Clay put down his palette and went to the door. He looked into the quiet dark face of the detective.

"This gentleman is from the *commissariat*," Madame Bernard said, as if to warn him.

"Oh yes — *entrez*." Clay stepped back and opened the door. The detective entered and deliberately closed the door in Madame Bernard's face, giving her a cold glance over his shoulder. He walked to the center of the room, glanced around him briefly at the easel, the primed canvases along the wall and the bottle on the bookcase, then took off his hat and sat down in a chair by the table.

"You live alone here, Monsieur 'All ?" he asked.

"Yes." Clay came forward. "What happened ? Did you find Barthelot ?"

"Tell me, Monsieur, you have no — housekeeper here ?" He looked at Clay with raised eyebrows, steadily.

"Not any more." Clay began to put his paints away. He turned to find the detective watching him.

"But there was someone, wasn't there ?"

"Yes."

"And where is she now, Monsieur ? Pardon if I ask you that."

"She doesn't live here any more."

"Isn't that, perhaps, a little sudden — a little recent, Monsieur ?"

"Since last night," Clay said quietly, then laughed and looked at the detective's bright dark eyes. "But she had nothing to do with it, Monsieur. If that's what you think you are mistaken. You can be sure of that."

"Undoubtedly Monsieur knows. Where does she live now, this mademoiselle ?"

"In a hotel on the Rue Vavin."

"And her name, please ?"

Clay frowned. "But I tell you . . ."

"Oh, it's routine, Monsieur," the detective interrupted. "But necessary, too."

"Arlette Fabre."

The detective leaned back in his chair. His overcoat fell away from his chest and the red ribbon of the *légion d'honneur* in his buttonhole was revealed. "Now, Monsieur." His fingertips tapped lightly on the table. "I think I know what has happened to your watch. This morning I went to see the family of this Barthelot. They live beyond the Porte de Vanves — his mother and his brother, who sells newspapers. It is very simple, Monsieur 'All. Paul Barthelot took your watch home to his brother. There is no doubt of it. And his brother has disposed of it — but we will trace the transaction. We will find where he sold it and recover it surely."

"But have you found Barthelot?"

"Why naturally, Monsieur. The police of France work with great dispatch. It was after we found Barthelot, and he did not have your watch, that I went to see his family. They are criminal types, it's plain to see. The brother, a *mutilé de la guerre*, sells newspapers, yes, but there is more to it than that. When I questioned him his answers were 'no,' 'yes,' 'I don't know.' Those are not the answers of an honest man. I have no doubt, Monsieur 'All, that this brother, Jean Barthelot, is a receiver of stolen property. Oh, he's wise, that one, as wise as any man with two legs. *Mutilé de la guerre* — I doubt it." The detective stood up. "Now, Monsieur, if you will accompany me to the commissariat."

Together they walked along the gravel path through the garden. From a window of the house an old woman watched them, turned from her knitting, and when they entered the area-way Madame Bernard was waiting. Her loose mouth spread in a smile and she came toward them, her eager short body quivering with her bouncing step.

"Monsieur 'All, something is wrong?"

"It's nothing."

"Pardon me, Madame, we are in a hurry," the detective said, and took Clay's arm.

"But wait, there is a *pneumatique* for Monsieur 'All." She felt in the pocket of her smock for the standard envelope of blue paper used for the transmission of brief notes by pneumatic tube

to all parts of Paris. "Have you had a misfortune, Monsieur 'All ?"

"I was robbed last night," Clay said.

"Robbed!" Madame Bernard gasped with pleasure. "Here ?"

"Yes, I was robbed of my watch and a phonograph and my wallet." Clay stuffed the *pneumatique* in a pocket of his coat.

"Was there much money, Monsieur ?"

"A few hundred francs."

"Hundreds of francs ! That's terrible, Monsieur 'All, unbelievable. Here in your pavillon ? How did the thief find you here ? How did he . . . ?"

"Come, Monsieur," the detective steered Clay toward the gate and they walked quickly along the Rue d'Alésia toward the corner. The old woman who sold Portuguese oysters was watching them from her stand across the street, and the *patron* of the café came and stood on the *terrasse*, frankly curious.

Clay lit a cigarette, and when they reached the *commissariat* on the Rue Boyer-Barret it was only half-smoked. He started toward the desk, but the detective touched his arm, saying, "This way, Monsieur." They turned left down a corridor and into an office at the end of it where a blond lieutenant was seated at a desk, the ribbons of many decorations on the breast of his jacket.

"Monsieur 'All ?" The lieutenant had blue eyes which were opened wide. His eyes and his small round mouth gave him a frank, questioning expression.

"Yes."

"Follow me, please."

Back along the corridor again they walked, Clay following the lieutenant, able to see the length of the hall over his head. They went down a flight of steps into darkness, into a cellar-like corridor where the twilight had become night. A light flashed yellow, a bulb on the end of a long swinging cord, and an *agent* saluted and walked beside Clay, at the heels of the lieutenant. They came to a cell and the *agent* unlocked it and opened the door. Clay saw the figure of a man stretched on a cot in the narrow cell. The lieutenant said something in a low

tone and the *agent* leaned over and caught the man's ankle, shaking it. He sat up, and Clay recognized Paul Barthelot. Even in the dim light he could see the sandy stubble of beard around the loose lips, the eyes half-closed against the light, receding into the shadow of high cheekbones. The lieutenant looked a question at Clay.

"Yes, that's he. That's Paul Barthelot," Clay said.

Barthelot got to his feet, stumbling against the slop bucket. His thin blond hair was tangled on his round skull.

"You're sure this is the man?" the lieutenant asked.

"Certainly."

"You're making a mistake." Barthelot came forward, his voice low-pitched. "You're making a mistake, I tell you."

"Silence," said the *agent*.

"But tell him, Monsieur 'All: Tell him you're mistaken," Barthelot's face was wet with perspiration; his lips moved loosely. "You know I didn't steal your watch. — Monsieur le lieutenant, you've got to let me go. Listen, he had femmes de nuit in his studio — every night there was a woman there, I tell you. Why don't you arrest these women? They stole his watch. I didn't do it."

"Monsieur 'All identifies the prisoner, Barthelot," the lieutenant said sonorously. "Is this the man who broke into your studio and stole your watch, Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"That's enough," the lieutenant said crisply, taking Clay's arm. "Monsieur makes the identification."

Clay saw the *agent* close the door of the cell, saw Barthelot's expressionless face behind the bars, his mouth opened, his eyes anxious and piglike in his sweaty red face. Clay followed the lieutenant back up the stairs to the office at the end of the corridor.

"Now, Monsieur 'All, it becomes necessary to draw up a full complaint against this Paul Barthelot," the lieutenant said. "Sit down, please."

"Where did you find him?" Clay asked.

"Well, where would a type like that go to spend a little

money, Monsieur, I ask you ? Naturally we found him in a snug little house not far from the Rue de la Gaité. Oh, we know where to look, I can tell you.” The lieutenant went to the doorway and called ; a moment later an old clerk entered and sat at a table near the window. He had a long yellow face and drooping gray moustaches. He looked like a gilded horse’s head above a horse-meat butcher’s shop, Clay thought. The old man opened a notebook, looking up at Clay over the silver rims of his spectacles.

“Now, Monsieur, the whole story please,” the lieutenant said.

The old clerk’s pen scratched steadily as Clay talked, and the lieutenant leaned back in his chair listening without a question until Clay had finished. Then he gave Clay a quick, keen glance and turned to a file of papers before him. “Now, Monsieur,” he said without looking up. “You say you recognized the voice as that of Paul Barthelot. You have known this Barthelot for some time ?”

“For about three weeks.”

“You are artiste peintre, you said ?”

“Yes. Barthelot was my model.”

“He posed for you, Monsieur, so that you could make a picture ?” The lieutenant leaned back in his chair, the tips of his spread fingers pressed together.

“Yes,” Clay said. The old gray clerk was writing in the notebook, shoulders hunched, occasionally glancing at Clay.

“What sort of picture did you paint, Monsieur ?”

“It was a prize fight picture — la boxe.”

“He posed then somewhat in the nude ?” the lieutenant asked with a lift of his eyebrows.

“Yes.”

“Tout nu, Monsieur ?”

“Tout nu ? Mais non, Monsieur le lieutenant. Il portait une culotte, comme boxeur.”

“Oui, je comprend. Parfaitement. Il était nu sauf pour une culotte. C’est correct, Monsieur ?”

“Oui, c’est correct.”

“Dîtes-moi, Monsieur,” the lieutenant leaned forward, his el-

bows on the desk. His voice dropped confidentially. "Dîtes-moi, on n'a pas fait de cochonnerie, non ?"

"Cochonnerie, Monsieur ?"

"Oui."

"Mais je ne comprend pas, Monsieur le lieutenant."

"Cochonnerie — malpropreté. Je veux dire, Monsieur —" The lieutenant cleared his throat. "Entre vous deux — Dîtes-moi, ce n'était pas une liaison amoureuse, non ?"

Clay's mouth opened, soundlessly. He was aware of the old clerk watching him, intent fingers poised to transcribe his response, of the lieutenant leaning toward him. He laughed, then checked himself at the officer's frown. "Is it the custom, Monsieur le lieutenant, to ask such a question of one who has a grievance in the law ? Is that the custom in France ? . . . ?"

"Monsieur, je demand pardon." The lieutenant raised one hand. "Mais, vous comprenez, Paul Barthelot a été arrêté déjà deux fois pour vagabondage et pédérastie. Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur." The lieutenant got to his feet. "Now the complaint must be prepared for your signature, Monsieur. If you will wait, please, there are seats in the hall."

Clay walked along the corridor to a large room where an *agent* sat behind the long, high desk. There were benches along the wall and Clay sat down, lighting a cigarette. There was a *défense de fumer* sign on the wall, but the *agent* also was smoking. He looked at Clay sharply, but said nothing.

As he sat on the worn bench, looking at the grimy walls plastered with instructions, warnings and notices, Clay could not forget the cell in the chill cellar of the *commissariat*, where Barthelot lay on a narrow cot. He thought of the man, with his few hundred stolen francs, seeking pleasure in an obscure brothel of a cheap district, finding a transient comfort in the arms of a paid woman. For a few hundred francs, a gold watch and a phonograph, for a few hours' escape, he had exchanged his freedom.

Clay remembered the *pneumatique*, and he tore the perforated edge of the envelope and opened out the sheet of paper. It was from Arlette :

Mon chér Clay : Ne peux-tu pas me pardonner. Je ne sais pas ce que j'avais hier soir. Tu sais que je t'aime, Clay. Ne peux-tu pas comprendre que j'étais très nerveuse ? Ton Arlette.

His attention was attracted by a creaking sound, a rhythmic tapping on the floor, and he looked up to see a man and woman approaching the *agent* at the desk. The man had only one leg ; his crutches grated on the floor in spite of their leather tips. The old woman with him was dressed all in black, her widow's clothes. The material was shiny, green-tinted from the years of her widowhood, and her white hair absorbed a pale green color. She leaned against the crippled man, holding to his arm, as he talked to the *agent*. Clay could not hear what was said, but he saw the *agent* nod toward him, and then they turned away from the desk and looked at him. They stood together in the center of the room, she small and frail beside his large torso, balanced on the crutches, and whispered together. Clay stood up and went to read a placard on the wall, with little attention to the formal French phrases. After a moment he heard the creak of the crutches and turned away from the *affiche*. The crippled man approached him slowly, stopped a few feet away, and with the crutches propped under his arms, took off his cap.

"Monsieur, I would like to talk to you." His tone was low ; his bright eyes watched Clay.

"Yes."

"I am the brother of Paul Barthelot. This is his mother." Madame Barthelot now came toward them, timidly. She stood behind her son and Clay noticed the frayed toes of her pointed shoes.

"They have arrested my brother, Paul," Jean Barthelot said.

"Yes, I know that."

"Monsieur 'All, Paul did not steal from you."

"I'm sure Paul would not steal," his mother said.

"Monsieur, you are an American. You come from a rich country here to France. Paul is a poor boy, a workingman's son. He does not know much about the world. He went to work for you as a model. He did not work with his hands and

you paid him forty francs a day. That's a lot of money, not to work with your hands. It was easy money for Paul. He would not give that up. Why should he steal from you, when you pay him forty francs a day?"

"I quit paying him that," Clay said. "I sent him away."

"Yes, but you would have painted another picture. You would have sent for Paul again. Tell me, Monsieur, why do you accuse my brother?"

"Because he did it. He took my watch, my phonograph — some money. I'm sure of it."

"But why are you so sure, Monsieur?"

"Listen," Clay said. "When I sent him away I paid him forty francs, even though he did not pose for me that day."

"Monsieur is very generous," Barthelot said, his lips drawing back from his teeth at the corner of his mouth.

"At that time I had a lot of money in my pocketbook — some thousand franc notes," Clay said quietly. "Paul saw them, and last night he returned. He must have waited outside in the garden, and when I came home he tied my hands and put a towel over my head and robbed me."

"Oh, no, not Paul," Madame Barthelot said. "Monsieur, you are mistaken. You must be mistaken."

"I'm sure of it," Clay said. "I recognized his voice."

"Oh, you recognized his voice," Jean Barthelot said tonelessly.

"Yes, he asked me if I had any jewelry. — It was his voice."

"But did you see Paul, Monsieur?"

"No, I didn't see him. He put a towel around my head."

"You did not see him. You heard only a few words, Monsieur, and yet you are prepared to say that it was Paul who said them. You will swear that Paul robbed you?"

"I'm positive it was his voice."

"Do you know what you are doing, Monsieur? Do you know that they will send Paul for years to the Santé — all because you think you heard his voice? Tell me, did they find Paul with your watch? Did they find him with your phonograph?"

"No." Clay was now back against the wall; Barthelot stood in front of him, his mother at his elbow. Barthelot's fat face shone in the electric light with little drops of sweat; his lips were moist.

"Monsieur 'All, this means nothing to you. A watch, a phonograph — what do they mean to you? A watch to count the hours Paul will pass in jail? A phonograph to play a merry tune while his mother weeps? No, Monsieur 'All, you could buy a thousand watches. To you that is nothing. But us, my mother and I, we are talking for the life of her son, my brother. That is why we come to you now. . . Monsieur 'All, withdraw the complaint." He paused only an instant, seeing Clay's hesitation. His knuckles stood out through white flesh as he gripped the crutches. "Monsieur, you did not see Paul. You did not see his face. You heard only a few words, and yet you will swear it was Paul's voice. But how often have you heard him speak, Monsieur? Did you ever see him before three weeks ago? Tell me that."

"No, that's true," Clay said.

"Monsieur 'All, look at us. We are honest people. My mother is a widow from the war. I am a war cripple. You see these crutches? They are the medals I won in the war, Monsieur. You see, I have lost a leg." Clay's eyes followed his to the pinned-up trouserleg. "Monsieur, I sell newspapers in a kiosk. I sit in a little booth all day, snow or rain or heat, calling, 'Paris Soir, l'Intransigeant, Petit Parisien,' — you have heard me, Monsieur, if you have passed by the Place de la Concorde. . . My mother works too, at her washboard. Barely we make enough to live, to buy bread and cheese and raw red wine. Our little home, Monsieur, is the home of honest people. That is our medal, my mother's medal. I have here two crutches. That is the medal of the soldier. In our home we have little food, little heat. We have poverty, and that is the medal of the honest workingman. Isn't that true? Poverty is the medal the world gives to the working man who is honest. If he is dishonest they give him death and prison. If a soldier is a coward they shoot him. . . Monsieur 'All, I am not a

coward and I am not dishonest. You see the proof of that. And yet, because you have lost a watch and a phonograph, because you heard a voice in the night, you would swear my brother Paul is a thief. I ask you, Monsieur 'All, withdraw the complaint."

"Oh, Monsieur!" There were tears on Madame Barthelot's cheek but she looked steadily at Clay, bending forward. "I beg you, withdraw the complaint. Paul is a good boy. We will find your watch for you. We will look all over the city of Paris for your watch. I promise you."

"Monsieur 'All, listen to me." Jean Barthelot touched Clay's arm lightly. "If there were seven men in the night and all spoke in turn, saying the same words, and one of them was Paul, could you tell it?"

"I don't know," Clay said.

"Even if you knew one of the seven was Paul you could not tell it, and yet late at night, almost asleep, you hear four words or so and you believe that it was Paul who said them. I ask you, Monsieur, is that fair? Would you send Paul to the Santé for that? — Wait. Listen. If there were proof, yes. If Paul had done this, I would say nothing. But there is no proof, Monsieur, only a voice in the night."

"Oh, Monsieur, withdraw the complaint," Madame Barthelot said.

Clay backed away uneasily, feeling in his pocket for a cigarette, screening himself in its smoke.

"Withdraw the complaint and it will be over. Paul can come home to his mother," Jean said.

Retirez la plainte, retirez la plainte, the words pressed in upon Clay from Madame Barthelot's trembling lips, from Jean's vibrant voice. Clay dropped his cigarette to the floor and stepped upon it.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. All right, I *will* withdraw the complaint."

He turned abruptly away and went back down the corridor to the lieutenant's office. The old clerk looked up steadily at

Clay above the rims of his spectacles, his long chin against his chest. "Where is Monsieur le lieutenant?"

"In two minutes, Monsieur, he will return." The clerk bit the handle of his pen. "Has Monsieur lived a long time in France?"

"About four years. Yes."

"You Americans." The clerk's voice was little above a whisper. "You come here to France with money to spend. You live in a poor quarter and spend thousands of francs. That's a great temptation, Monsieur." He shook his head. "This young man is not alone to blame, if he stole your watch, if he stole your watch, Monsieur." The clerk turned his head quickly away as the blond lieutenant entered the room.

"Ah, Monsieur, it is ready. Here, it is ready." The lieutenant picked up from his desk two sheets of foolscap, bound together and stamped with the seal of the Republic.

"I have decided, Monsieur le lieutenant, not to sign a complaint," Clay said slowly. The old clerk looked up with a sudden quick nod of satisfaction, but the lieutenant stared at Clay blankly for a long, silent moment, then quietly began to argue with him. "Why is this, Monsieur?" He pursed his lips, shook his head. "Of course Monsieur knows his own mind, but does he realize — this man Barthelot is a criminal type, that's plain."

"But there's no proof," Clay said. "I can't be sure."

"It's true we have not found your watch, but that will come. In time it will be found, Monsieur, and your gramophone too."

"I mean there's no proof he stole it. I didn't see him. I only heard a voice."

"Of course if Monsieur cannot be sure. If he is not positive whose voice he heard." The lieutenant thumbed over the pages of foolscap. "But perhaps you had better reflect a little before you decide. This is a serious matter. — Does not Monsieur believe that it was Barthelot who robbed him?"

"I don't know. I can't be sure. It was late at night and I had taken several glasses of cognac."

"Monsieur knows best the circumstances." The lieutenant stood up. "But how can there be justice, how can the police of France function, if criminals are set free in this manner? Monsieur 'All, if you do not sign this complaint you fail to fulfill your responsibility to the state and to society."

"I'm trying to fulfill my responsibility as I see it," Clay said stiffly, and later as he went out to the Rue Boyer-Barret he was glad that he had withdrawn the complaint and he felt relief that he would not have to go through with a burdensome court process. He felt relief from the pressure upon him, the pressure of maladjustment that precipitated his moods of self-disgust, that made him shrink into himself. And walking quickly back to his studio he decided that he would leave Paris for a few days ; he would go on a sketching trip in the valley of the Marne.

VI

ARLETTE FABRE had been ten years in Paris, and now again she was in a small hotel room as she had been in the beginning. There were wine-colored curtains hanging at the tall windows ; the wallpaper was a musty wine color. The bureau was mahogany, with a marble top, a shadowy impersonal object ; on the streaked marble her toilet set was forlorn, casting alien shadows, losing its identity in the gloom of the room. In the corner the white enamel cover of the *bidet* reflected the same musty glow as the marble ; silence in the room was nearly unbearable but she could imagine nothing but silence in it. If she had brought her phonograph she would have played a record, but she knew that the thin mechanical music could not dispel the vapor of despair that lingered in the room.

Now she must think, make her plans again, but she could not order her mind. She would have two weeks, three weeks — a month perhaps, before necessity's compulsion. Then she could go to the cafés of Montmartre where dancing girls were needed. She could be a waitress in a restaurant, slave in a department store, but she would not go back to La Croisette. Not after ten years. She would like to see again the orange jackets of the

fishermen, the pale blue nets spread to dry from the mastheads of the boats. She would like to see great jellyfish obscenely trailing their corposelike tentacles behind them in the clear water off the quay ; she would like to see the surf pounding on the beach, feel the astringent of the salt mist on her face, and watch the sardine fleet put out to sea. But she would not go back to La Croisette, not after ten years.

She remembered now her aching back, her sore fingers in agony from the salt. In her childhood she had learned to count from sardines, from packing them in a box. Head to tail, tail to head, evenly in the wooden box, then a layer of salt, then head to tail and tail to head again. Box after box empty before her in the morning on the long tables slimy with fish, on the long tables reeking with fish ; boxes filled one by one and neatly covered and shipped off to Nantes, thirty kilometers away ; sardines by the thousands caught in the faded blue nets, dumped squirming into the boats, weighed and sold at the fish packery, piled by the basketful on the foul table before her, to be packed in the little boxes, head to tail, tail to head, then a layer of salt, and tail to head, head to tail again : could she ever forget these things ?

When she was nine years old she had first worked in the packery. Her father had been lost in a storm, within sight of land, within sight of the blinking light on the tip of the cape which formed the protecting arm of the harbor of La Croisette. Then her mother had taken her to the packery, to the fish house which until then had been a place of pleasure and delight, where she had gone when the boats came in, gaily to watch the sardines passed up from the boats, to see them weighed and carried to the deft fingers of the women, to watch with satisfaction the swift mechanics of packing them, head to tail and tail to head in the boxes. Sometimes there were other fish, which were auctioned ; clumsy *dorades* or baby sharks with their oily bodies reflecting garishly the blue nets and the orange clothes of the fishermen, brilliant mineral colors like the spread of oil on still water. Then her father had died.

“Money,” her mother had said. “We must have money.”

Money, always money, Arlette thought. There must be

money for clothes, for food and heat ; money for fish to eat when she was packing thousands of them in the little boxes, with bent, aching back and stiff sore fingers. There were fish to feed all of France. Fish to feed the whole village passed through her fingers daily, yet there must be money to buy fish for herself ; she must pack a hundred fish to earn one. She must go through the gray dawn with her sabots clattering on the quay ; she must go each day to renew the fish smell that never left her, that was in her hair, impregnated in her fingers, that followed her home each night to her bed and clung to the damp sheets like a malignant mist.

In summer artists came to La Croisette. There were *pensions* on the other side of the cape, by the sea and the beach. Painters set up their easels on the quay, to paint the boats with their blue nets drying, the orange sails, and the stone houses of the town. They painted the blue sea and the gray marshes. They painted the squat fish packery and they painted Arlette at work with the other women, packing fish head to tail and tail to head through the bright hours of summer. There was one of these who set up his easel by the great arched doorway, in the curved shadow of the arch. He was not six feet from Arlette and she was the dominant figure of his composition. She was seventeen then. He painted her with her sleeves rolled above her elbows, her arms shining from the oily fish. He painted her with her hair bright in sunlight from a window, her young breasts held flat in her tight bodice, her feet wide apart as she worked ; strong, high-arched feet hidden in the varnished sabots. She remembered his strong teeth and his smile ; she remembered his dark eyes when he paused to look at her, drinking *muscadet*, the strong musk-tasting wine of the district, from a bottle he kept between his feet.

She saw him several times after that and once, when she came upon him painting a corner of Nôtre Dame de Pitié, the sixteenth-century church built near the sea, he called to her and asked her to pose for him. But she must work, she said, and hurried away. Yet the next Sunday — she did not remember how it came about — she was sitting on the quay with the salt

wind in her face while he painted her. She drank some of his *muscadet*. She laughed with him, tossed her head, and walked home that night as gaily as one might in heavy sabots.

There were two other Sundays when she posed, and then very suddenly she was on her way to Paris with a wonderful feeling of freedom from the reeking tables and the fish and the boxes to be filled. Then she had thought that five hundred francs was a very good price to pay ; it had made her mother happy, and he had called it his dowry as they were travelling second class to Paris.

She remembered the slippers he bought her in Nantes, before they took the train. They were green, with high shiny heels, and he bought her a green dress, too, and she packed her Breton costume away forever. He bought the green shoes in Nantes first to be worn on the sidewalks of Paris, clattering on the *trottoir* of the smoky station, climbing the steep inclines of Montmartre. The little green shoes had taken her far from La Croisette, far from the sea and the fishermen's boats and the shining masses of tiny fish on the long tables. And there had been many green slippers since then. How often had men left her with money and good wishes, but always there had been the full reckless freedom of a girl who is young and attractive and who knows where to go to amuse herself and where to go when money must be earned, who knows the cabarets where girls may dance for money without being *poules*. But now ten years had passed ; now she was twenty-seven years old. The fish smell was no longer a part of her being ; now she had learned to rub her skin with alcohol to rid it of impurities ; she had learned to make herself attractive to men, to tease and encourage them, freely to love them. In ten years she had perfected herself, as if she had created and conditioned each cell of her body new for one purpose, and now at twenty-seven these cells had reached their peak of efficiency and passed it. Now there would be for her three years, four years — five at the most, and the crushing fear pressed upon her, the fear of the stenching piles of sardines, the fear of used dishes in a restaurant, of alien bodies in a cabaret, that had made her cling to Clay so closely. The pent-in fear

that made the dark-papered walls of the hotel room crowd in upon her sent her to the window to look out at the bare walls of the houses, turning her back on the objects in the room that had lost their identity because of the room and because of the tight grip of horror at her heart. It was because of this, not then so definite, that she had clung to Clay, had watched over him and questioned him and sought to explore his attitude, to force him to a stated position. She should not have been so like a jealous woman, she should not so have exposed herself ; but she no longer had the old ebullient confidence, the ready acquiescence to the circumstance of life. She turned from the window, saw again the toilet articles lost in their shadows on the marble, saw the brass bedstead reflecting light as static as a brilliant daub of paint, in its quality lifeless and silent and oppressive. *

In the stores girls stood long hours at the counters for a meagre wage that left them money for food at *prix fixe* restaurants, for autobus fare and a rented bed, for now and then a *demi-blonde* at a *café* which must be tended carefully, slowly sipped to last the evening out, to wear away the hours of pretended animation. In the restaurants there were the one franc tips like coffee stains on the table cloth ; there was weary labor slipping among the tables, carrying the plates with their *chateaubriands* and tiny sprigs of cresson, the salad and the small bottle of *vin ordinaire* to be mixed with water by the diner who for five francs and a fifty centime tip was her master, to command her as a slave, to criticize her and condemn her, to hold over her always the threat of the *gérant*. Was it any wonder that even in the finest restaurants the waiters sometimes spat in the consommé ? And she would do it too. *Zut, alors*, but she would do it. Or in the cabarets — *How old are you, Mademoiselle* ? the manager would ask. I'm twenty-two. *Twenty-two ? Sans blague ? You seem more than that.* But I can dance. Men like to dance with me, you will see. . . And then the slow evenings, the dragging tangos, the cold waltzes. *Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir ?* mumbled in her ear by Americans who pressed against her in dancing, a polite request from Frenchmen which implied acceptance, a thundering invitation from laughing Scan-

dinavians, a velvety supplication from South Americans with oily eyebrows and cold, sensual mouths — How cheap a price is debasement at one hundred francs. After that could food be so important, could sleep be possible ?

Arlette caught up her handbag and opened it ; her long fingers slid among the contents of compact, lipstick, handkerchief, and drew out a sheet of paper and her fountain pen. Already she had sent Clay a *pneumatique* ; there had been no response. She had waited these long hours in the close room, twice had gone down to inquire at the *bureau* if there was any mail for Mademoiselle Fabre, twice had returned with dragging feet up the carpeted stairs to the repellent room.

Chéri, she wrote. But there was room to add *mon* before the words. *Mon cheri*. It must be simple, direct. She must show him her regret ; she must hold out her promise for the future. *How I regret my conduct last night. I was bad, but only because I love you, Clay. I who wished to be so gentle ! I know quite well that it wasn't right, but I was a little drunk, Clay. You said yourself that I was tipsy. If you don't love me, if you don't want me as before, at least can't we be friends ? If you don't want me to be amorous, I will always be very affectionate. Pardon your little friend, who is so unhappy. Have pity on me and come to see your Arlette.*

VII

CLAY took a taxicab from the Gare Montparnasse to his studio on the Rue d'Alésia. For three days he had stayed at a small hotel in the valley of the Marne, at a tiny village enclosed by long yellow hills running parallel to the river. His sketch-box was in the taxicab beside him, and the stack of canvases strapped together. Some of them pleased him. There was an old Norman church, a sturdy mass of stone that rose up out of a field of mustard, which he had painted. In the hotel there was a *bistrot* where the workingmen of the village drank — a *Chambéry fraise* before dinner, a Pernod in the evening. The zinc-topped bar nearly filled the little room ; in it were reflected the rows of

bottles and the shelves of dark wood, acquiring the blue sheen of the zinc. He had painted the *patron* behind the bar in his gray shirt and black apron, with a cloth cap peaked with leather on his head. When he prepared to leave the *patron* talked with him, very shyly, about painting. He asked about the pigments Clay used, if they were expensive. He asked how much a canvas cost, if Clay stretched them himself. He asked how much artists were paid for their work, and finally he asked Clay to price the portrait of himself, of the *patron* behind the bar with his rows of bottles, as everybody knew him.

"Why, you can have it," Clay said. "You've paid for it already. You've paid for it with peace and quiet, with good food and good wine and three days of a tranquil life."

The *patron* hung the picture at once behind the bar, among the bottles, and then he came and stood with Clay, like a customer. He brought up from the cellar a bottle of brandy, twenty-five years old, which he himself had put down, and they toasted the painting. Looking at the faded gray moustaches of the *patron* in the picture, the old man called upon his likeness by name, chuckling and slapping Clay's shoulder, and Clay missed one train and waited over an hour for the next while they finished the bottle together.

Now as the taxicab drew up in front of the gate in the tall gray wall Clay felt refreshed and pleased to be at home again. He greeted the concierge with a smile, leaned over to pat Mitsou's gray head as the dog lay relaxed in sunlight on the stone of the areaway.

"There is news for you, Monsieur 'All," Madame Bernard said eagerly.

"News?"

"Yes. The mademoiselle came to see you — twice. I told her you were away, I did not know where." The woman smiled maliciously. "She went away each time."

Clay stood looking at her and after a brief, embarrassed moment Madame Bernard turned her head away, stepped back to the door marked *concierge*. "And there's a *pneumatique* for you, Monsieur 'All. It came two days ago." She disappeared for

an instant into her room, long enough to snatch an envelope from the rack. Clay put it in his pocket and walked past her out of the areaway and onto the gravel path leading through the garden. The leaves of the acacia trees were bright and the ivy climbing the wall of the dismantled factory behind his *pavillon* was now a wreath of green leaves. Clay unlocked the door. It was slightly stuck from the rains and opened with a jerk, spreading a golden path of dust in the sunlight.

He opened and read the *pneumatique* with a frown. Then he crumpled it and put it on the bookcase. All at once he was depressed again and he sat looking at the ray of dust-laden sunlight, at the sketch-box and the canvases by the door. In three days he had nearly forgotten Arlette. He got up and unstrapped the canvases and put them against the wall. One of them, the sketch of the square church in the mustard field, he put on the easel. Looking at it, his mood improved with the eternal resilience of the creative artist who can lose his cares in contemplation of his work provided only that it be a work in progress, on which there is yet something to be done which calls for analysis and scrutiny and a new approach. But outside Paris sparkled in the sunlight and Clay thought of the valley of the Marne, the fields of mustard, the yellow hills. He should not have returned to the city. Suddenly he jumped to his feet and reached for his hat. He hurried through the garden to the street and signalled to a passing taxicab.

“Place Vendôme,” he said, and dropped back on the leather seat. He felt impatient now, and when they had reached the Right Bank and were moving along the Rue de Rivoli, past the Louvre and the Tuilleries, he looked out at the gardens, at the long arched façade of the street, with sudden excitement. Now he had decided, definitely, that he would leave Paris for a while ; he would go to the south of France, to Avignon, Arles, or Marseilles. He would sit on the quay at Toulon with a view of the harbor and the diamond flashes of sunlight on the sea ; he would leave Paris behind him for a month at least.

To enter the bank on the Place Vendôme, was to enter another world for Clay, but a familiar world of dignity and quiet, of well-

ordered routine and rigid values. Once through the bronze doors, on the dull green carpet, Clay had an important feeling of security, which he found expressed in the attentive manner of the smiling cashier. The cashier was an Englishman. He lived in Auteuil with a French wife and two children. He came to the Place Vendôme by bus and Metro each morning ; he returned to late dinner in Auteuil and in the evenings sat for an hour or two in a café playing chess, sometimes went to the cinema. The bank was a foreign bank and from his grilled window he saw the parade of faces that changed from year to year, the parade of those who presented bank drafts, opened an account for a few months, then disappeared forever. There were some, like Clay expatriates, who remained for years. Now there were fewer Americans, fewer English, and the cashier greeted Clay as warmly as a shopkeeper with a dwindling clientele.

"Five thousand francs, Mr. Hall ? How would you like it ? Are you going on a trip ?"

"I think so."

"To the seaside ?" the cashier counted out the pale-tinted paper money.

"To the south of France, perhaps."

"Oh yes, . . . Nice ?" the cashier announced his nationality by mentioning the resort of the English middle class abroad.

"No, I'm going somewhere to work."

"I was in Nice one spring." The cashier looked up, a smile making his plump face more round. "For Mi-Carême. The fête there was jolly, but there were a good many rowdies late at night."

"Yes, it's always that way," Clay said. "Listen, I want to sell a bond."

"We can take care of it."

"I don't know what the market value is. Suppose I send it to you by registered mail ?"

"Certainly."

As Clay put the money in his wallet the cashier watched him, his soft fingers spread on the counter. "You're not thinking of going back to the States, are you, Mr. Hall ?"

"Not yet."

"Since the depression so many have gone back."

"I'll be here for a while longer — as long as I can stay."

Clay walked to the Left Bank, from the Place Vendôme to the Tuileries, across the Pont Royal and along the quay to the Rue Bonaparte. The sidewalk bookstands were open and the flower markets were bright in the sunlight, and now in the spring there were fishermen along the Seine, lone still figures by the water. At the Café des Deux Magots Clay stopped for an *apéritif* and as he sat on the *terrasse* looking at the graceful form of the church of Saint Germain des Prés, the oldest church of Paris, he felt a sense of peace that for the moment abated his insistent desire to act, to escape.

Later he took a taxi to the Rue de Tournon. He found the Trois de Coeurs empty ; Harry was seated on a stool behind the bar, reading an English newspaper.

"Harry, what hotel is Guy Hart staying in ?"

"Guy ? — He's gone away, Mr. Hall."

"Gone south ?"

"Yes, he left for Avignon two days ago." Harry opened a drawer behind the bar. "There's a letter for you."

"From Guy ?"

"No. He told me to tell you to come south and meet him in Avignon. No, this is from that girl of yours. — She left it here the other night. Say, is it all right for her to charge drinks to you ?"

"Has she ?"

"Yes."

"I'll pay it then." Clay opened the letter. There was only a line : *Clay, I am waiting at my hotel for you to call, Arlette.* He folded the note and put it in his pocket. "Harry, I'm going south for a month."

"Soon, Mr. Hall ?"

"Now. Right away. Today."

"I'd like to take a holiday myself. — Here's your bill, Mr. Hall."

"She drank a lot, didn't she ?"

"Yes, she was here two nights — looking for you, I think."

Clay went next to the hotel on the Rue Vavin and asked at the *bureau* for Mademoiselle Fabre. The *patronne* told him that she was not in and he hesitated. He should leave her a note, he thought, but then he could write to her from Avignon. He went out to the street, turning toward the Boulevard du Montparnasse, and he had not walked a block when he heard a flurry of footsteps, high heels ringing on the pavement, and Arlette caught his arm.

"Clye, where have you been? I've looked for you everywhere. I've been twice to your studio."

"I've been away, Arlette — in the country."

They stood on the corner, for an instant silent. Her face was flushed and her eyes were brightly green.

"Clye, I want to talk to you. Didn't you get my notes?"

"Yes, I just passed by your hotel. — Let's sit down here." Clay turned toward the *terrasse* of a small restaurant. They went to a table and the *patron* was immediately at their side. Once he had been a waiter at the Dôme.

"Albert!" Clay said. "Comment ça va?"

"I'm glad to see you, Monsieur 'All. I am patron now. This is my restaurant."

"You must have saved your money."

"Oh, well — The service here is very good, Monsieur 'All. Our chateaubriand — épantant! Come at the dinner hour some time, you will see."

"I will, Albert. — For now, two beers."

"I want Pernod," Arlette said.

"A Pernod and a demi then."

As soon as Albert had gone Arlette's nervous fingers pressed Clay's arm. "Clye, why haven't you come to see me? Why haven't you written me?"

"I've been away, in the country. But listen, Arlette, I meant what I said. That's all finished. Let's don't quarrel now."

Arlette was silent while Albert put the glasses before them. He mixed the Pernod with water and at once she lifted the glass, drinking deeply.

"Yes, I know. Yes, I understand, Clye." She waited an instant and Albert moved over by the hedge. "Clye, I hate you. You're cruel."

"Oh, now," Clay laughed. "Arlette, be more casual. You're too serious about it."

"It is serious to me, my friend." Her eyes were the yellow-green color of the Pernod as she looked at him.

"Was it serious to you in the beginning, Arlette? No. It was a pleasant arrangement, a temporary arrangement. It was to save your hotel rent, wasn't it?"

"That was my excuse perhaps — my excuse only."

"If our ideas were different about it, I'm sorry," Clay said.

She raised her glass and drank the rest of the Pernod, then sighed. "Where were you going, Clye, when I stopped you?"

"Home."

"To your studio?"

"Yes."

"At least then," she turned her bright eyes toward him, "at least, my friend, I will come with you to get my gramophone. I am lonely without my phono."

"Arlette, your phonograph's been stolen."

"Stolen?"

"A thief broke into my studio and stole it."

"Stolen! Oh, Clye, it is not necessary to tell me that. I am not an old witch to ride after you on my broomstick."

"It's true, Arlette. He stole your phonograph and my watch."

"No, Clye, you don't need to tell me that. Am I so disagreeable then? Why do you dislike me? Will you send the phonograph to my hotel, then?"

"I'll buy you another one and send it to you." Clay signalled to Albert. "L'addition, s'il vous plaît."

"Quatre francs, Monsieur."

Clay put a five franc note on the table and rose to his feet.

"Clye, let's have another drink."

"No."

"At some other café then, let's have another drink."

"No, I'm in a hurry, Arlette."

She followed him to the sidewalk. "In a hurry?"

"I'm going away — to the south of France."

"Oh." She drew a deep breath. "For a long time?"

"A month perhaps."

"Are you going alone, Clye?"

"Yes."

"No you're not. You're going with a woman."

Clay shrugged his shoulders. He signalled to a taxicab which was yet a hundred yards away.

"That's the whole explanation then, isn't it? There's another woman. That's been it all the time."

"No."

Brakes grated. "Taxicab, Monsieur?"

"Oui. Attendez."

"Clye, wait. Don't go now. I'm not jealous. I'll be gentle. Really. I promise it."

"It's too late, Arlette." He opened the door of the cab.

"Can't you understand that? I don't want to be unpleasant."

"Clye, where are you going in the south of France? I'll follow you. I'll find you. If there's another woman . . ."

"If it makes you any happier to believe that there's another woman, if you want that as a reason, all right," Clay said.

"Oh, I knew it from the beginning! Clye, you lied to me. You . . ."

Clay stepped into the cab and shut the door against her fury. He called his address to the driver and as the taxicab rolled away Arlette stood on the curb with tears in her eyes, but tears of anger now and not self-pity.

At home in his studio Clay stuffed his clothes into a suitcase and dumped tubes of paint into the sketch-box, putting a handful of brushes without selection into the tray provided for them. Now he knew that he was running away; his escape could not come too soon. He felt that by leaving Paris behind him he could forget all that had happened in the past month; he could free himself of self-reproach, of the feeling that he had been hard and cruel, as Arlette had said.

In a garage on the Rue d'Alésia Clay kept the automobile he

had bought second-hand three years before. He waited in the bare shadow and the grease-smell of the garage while a mechanic filled the gas tank. The car was long and awkward ; underneath the hood the engine was small, compact, like a single pea in a pod. The top was down. It was pleasant to sit at the wheel, with the motor running smoothly, to start on an aimless journey for which only the pleasure of going, of travelling, would be excuse enough. Clay stopped in front of the spiked gate and went to get his sketch-box and suitcase. The valise was distended ; the clasp at one end had come loose and Clay stopped at a shop near the Porte d'Orléans to buy a strap for it.

"Monsieur goes on a journey ?" the fat proprietor asked as he spread an array of straps before Clay on the counter.

"Yes, to Avignon."

"Avignon ? Ah, there's a city. Avignon is a fine city, Monsieur. Every year I go there with my son — a business trip, you understand. Do you know Aux Nymphes, Monsieur ?"

"Aux Nymphes ?"

"Yes, Madame Géroux's house, the finest in Avignon. When you are there, Monsieur, if you want to amuse yourself. . . It's behind the Hotel de Ville and has neon lights, very bright and red, spelling the name above the door. . ."

"I don't know Aux Nymphes," Clay said, and later, on the road to Fontainebleau, he was still laughing at the absurdity of a Parisian nostalgic about the pleasures of a provincial town.

By three-thirty Clay had passed through Fontainebleau ; at five o'clock he was in Sens and stopped in a *bistrot* opposite the twelfth century gothic cathedral for a *fine maison*. He drank the brandy hurriedly, with water for a chaser, and pressed on again. It was becoming dark as he passed Auxerre, on the road which circled the city across the river Yonne, and he could barely make out the dominant shape of the cathedral. The town rose in a solid mass from the river, building up like a child's blocks to the high cathedral. Lights sparkled in the great shadowed mass.

On the way to Avallon Clay stopped for drinks at several

roadside cafés, in nearly every town he passed through, and as the car mounted the hill leading to the city he was singing, loudly and off-key, "I left my girl in Avallon," and laughing crazily into the night. He felt immeasurably light-hearted. He jammed on the brakes in front of the Hôtel de la Poste, by its ancient arched gateway, and stumbled into the dining room. He ordered a brandy, then escargots and steak, a bottle of Pommard and a baba au rhum, and while he was eating, while he was drinking the silken wine, he decided that he would drive all night ; he would go to bed in Avignon the next morning. In one night he would dispose of six hundred and ninety-three kilometers and six hundred and ninety-three petty cares and minor worries and trivial details that oppressed him.

He counted off the kilometers as he drove through the night. At Saulieu there was excellent capon at the Hotel de la Côte d'Or, and Saulieu was two hundred and fifty kilometers from Paris. And Paris was three hundred and forty kilometers from Chalons-sur-Sâone. Macon had a charming quay beside the Sâone and a good red wine called after it, and Macon was four hundred kilometers from Paris. Four hundred kilometers — two hundred and fifty miles. Now it was after midnight. A porter was closing the shutters on a café facing the quay. Clay stopped the car and got out, walking stiff-legged to the door.

"It's closing time, Monsieur," the *patron* said. He was wiping glasses behind the zinc-sheathed bar.

"But one small glass, Monsieur le patron. I'm travelling a long way tonight."

"To Lyon ?"

"No, beyond that — to Avignon."

"Yes, that's a long journey."

"And a dry journey. . . Monsieur le patron will serve me one fine maison ?"

"Under those circumstances, Monsieur, yes."

"And perhaps a bottle to take with me ?"

"Certainly, Monsieur."

Clay gulped the brandy and carried the bottle under his arm back to the car. There were lights across the river, brilliant in

the spring night, and the stars were clear overhead. He eased himself behind the steering wheel, remembered that he had no corkscrew.

"Hey, Josef," he called to the porter.

"Oui, Monsieur."

"Je n'ai pas de tire-bouchon."

"Tire-bouchon, Monsieur? Attendez." The porter came forward, taking a corkscrew from the pocket of his striped jacket. Clay gave him the bottle.

"Tell me," Clay said, "why are all porters in France named Josef?"

"My name is Armand, Monsieur."

"In America porters are named George," Clay said.

The cork came from the bottle with a full deep sound like a stone dropped into a well.

"Have a drink, Josef?"

"After you, Monsieur."

Clay took a long swallow, then returned the bottle to the porter. While the man drank Clay started the motor. The porter corked the bottle.

"Bon voyage, Monsieur."

"Merci, au revoir."

On the road again, the curving highway, past farms and villages seen always through the spaced trees that regularly lined the roads, on to Lyon, to the great steep hill leading down to the river Rhône and the city, now four hundred and seventy kilometers from Paris. Late at night he could drive quickly though the city, across a bridge and along the quay, following the signs to the road to Vienne. After two o'clock in the morning and the town of Vienne was dark, silent; suddenly around a corner onto the road by the Rhône came a troop of colonial soldiers, the hoofs of their horses clattering on the cobbles. They were Moroccan spahis, turbanned, red-cloaked, with high-stocked saddles. Mounted and armed, moving inexplicably along the river road at two-thirty in the morning. Clay drove on swiftly into the mystery of the night. Valence at half-past three, long before the dawn, and Avignon now only one hundred and twenty-

three kilometers away. The air was warmer ; occasionally Clay stopped by the roadside for a drink, and as he raised the bottle he heard *cigales* in the grass. Montélimar was only a few lights in the darkness, but when Montélimar had been left behind the night was lifting ; at Orange it was light enough clearly to see the arch of triumph built by the legions of Rome, and after Orange the sun rose over Clay's left shoulder. The headlights of the car faded into the strengthening light, the hills and trees took form, then color ; the wide flat country of the valley of the Rhône was spread before him. And then Avignon at last ; he was very tired. He knew the way, knew how to avoid the city, but there were many wagons even on the road which circled the city walls, for it was Saturday and market day.

From the north one comes suddenly into the city, with no view of its battlements and the papal palace. It was not until Clay had driven around the city and turned upon the suspension bridge that led to the road to Nîmes that he could look back and see the swift yellow water of the Rhône, the yellowish stone of the old Pont d'Avignon and beyond it the massive ramparts, above which the city rose to the crowning form of the Palais des Papes and the black cedars in the park. And ahead of him as he drove on toward Villeneuve-les-Avignon was the tall sentinel tower of Philippe-le-Bel, once the southern end of the Pont d'Avignon, and beyond it, on a high hill to the right, the fourteenth century Fort Saint André. All these things were familiar to Clay. He had studied them and painted them.

On the outskirts of Villeneuve, before entering the narrow streets of the town, stood Madame Boudin's *pension*, where Clay had lived before. It was not yet seven o'clock in the morning, but as he turned on the dusty road past the tower of Philippe-le-Bel he saw a wreath of smoke above the chimney of the pink stucco hotel ; when he stopped before the door he saw Madame Boudin inside.

“Monsieur 'All ! A cette heure du matin !”

“Madame, comment allez-vous ?”

“You look hungry, Monsieur 'All.” She was smiling, her

fat face creased in many merry wrinkles, her great bosom trembling with her breathing.

“I’ve had no breakfast.”

“What would you like? Do you come to stay awhile? For many months this time, I hope.”

“Brioche and coffee,” Clay said. “Is Monsieur Hart up yet?”

“Monsieur ’Art? He’s not here any more, Monsieur.”

“No?”

“No, he left two days ago. There was a little incident.”

“An incident, Madame?”

“He drinks too much, this friend of yours, Monsieur ’All. But never mind that. I’ll get your breakfast.”

“But what happened, Madame? Tell me about it.” They were standing now on the tiled floor of the *salle à manger*; beyond was the garden, enclosed by concrete walls.

“It’s nothing. He threw a bottle at my husband.”

Clay laughed, and she said quickly: “Oh, he did not hit him. He didn’t try to hit him, perhaps. But it broke the mirror over the bar, you see. The next day he paid for it and left. Now, Monsieur, I’ll get your breakfast. The coffee is ready. Shall I send it up to your room?”

“Yes, all right.”

“At the top of the stairs, first door on the left.”

Clay carried his suitcase and sketch-box to the upper floor. He put the suitcase on the bed and turned to the window. There was a table by the window, a chair beside it. The window framed the stiff cylinder of the tower of Philippe-le-Bel, and when Madame Boudin brought his breakfast Clay sat at the table to eat and looked out at the yellow-white tower. The air was sparkling; the dust was white as cream and in the distance were the long low hills, gray in the light, rolling away into the distance like the hills of the plains country. They made him think of Texas, and thinking of Texas he remembered his aunt, her pale tender letters, her constant solicitude. He had not written to her in several weeks. Now he was not sleepy. He had finished his breakfast, was lingering over the coffee, and had

lit a cigarette. There was stationery in a drawer of the table, a pen and ink. Clay pushed the dishes aside and drew a sheet of paper toward him.

End of Book One

BOOK TWO

I

IN THE late spring Dennis Coleman died ; in May when the green hills were red-shadowed with Mexican daisies, when the yucca bloomed yellow-white on tall green stalks and the blooms of the cob cactus were purple. On the side of a hill, in tall grass where jackrabbits leaped and ran, a chaparral cock raced suddenly from a thicket of dogwood and the old roan horse bolted, in the blind fright of an old lady.

Coleman lay for a long time on the hillside, beside the stone where his head had struck, and the roan horse grazed on a slope a mile away, across a draw in the rolling hills. When sunset came the horse turned homewards, with head held high, dancing away from the trailing bridle-reins, and Melvin saw it as he was driving the milch cows in from the small side pasture by the house. He saw the riderless horse at the gate in the barbed wire fence, tossing its head, and he heard its neigh.

Melvin ran along the lane to the gate, stumbling, breathing with real pain, and when he came to the pasture gate he swore furiously as the roan horse perversely tried to escape being caught, trotting away with the reins dangling.

"You old gray bastard," Melvin shouted. "Damn you, stand still."

At last he caught the reins and swung into the saddle. When he turned the horse's head away from the gate it balked and pulled on the bit, and he had to kick it, to drum his heels hard on its fat flanks. As it trotted away the roan jerked its head from side to side, turned its eyes back toward the ranch-house. It would not maintain its pace. From a gallop it would slow to a trot, to a walk, and then again Melvin's booted heels would beat on its sides.

The sun had set beyond the hills and the air was a soft amber color that darkened to shadow in the grass-tips. The hoofs of the roan horse fell almost soundlessly and the tall grass whispered against its hocks. Forcing the horse, Melvin rode along the rim of a gully and turned up a hill, and at its summit he stood up in the stirrups and looked around him. At length, on the opposite slope, he saw a dark figure in the grass and turned the roan down the hill. He sent the horse galloping headlong, sparks flying from its steel shoes as they struck against rock surfaces.

Late at night the telephone rang on the landing of the stairs, midway between the first and second stories of the gabled house in Rutherford. Amon Hall awakened at the first spaced ringing and opened his eyes, looking at bars of glowing moonlight on the ceiling of the bedroom. He closed his eyes, and his lips moved in protest, pressing down against his gums, as he waited for the sound to stop. But the ringing continued, insistent, with brief pauses, and at last Amon turned back the covers and put his bony legs over the side of the bed. In his nightshirt he stalked across to the door and threw it open. The hardwood floors gleamed faintly and dim light came through the stained glass windows at the landing. When he had installed the windows fifty years ago it had been the first stained glass in Rutherford and people had come to see it, as they had come in curiosity to inspect the plumbing, to pull the flush-chain of the first toilet built after the reservoir had filled. He walked across to the banister, and now he realized that the ringing had ceased. He heard Olivia's muted voice and saw a vague white form by the telephone stand.

"Papa, is that you?"

"Yes." He walked stiffly down the stairs, holding to the railing.

"It's the ranch calling for you, Papa."

"I can't talk now," he said, running his tongue over his gums. "Olivia, get me my teeth."

She went silently past him, shadowy in the light, and he sat down with the telephone in his hand. She returned with the

glass in which he kept his false teeth at night and he inserted the plates in his mouth. All the time a voice had been saying "Hello," thinly into the receiver.

"Yes, hello. Yes, this is Senator Hall. Oh, hello, Melvin. What's that you say? Your father? What's that . . .?"

"What is it, Papa?"

"Dennis Coleman is dead," Amon said. "He got thrown off his horse in the south pasture. . . Melvin, tell those people to hang up. I can't hear you."

There was a succession of clicks on the party line, then Melvin's voice came clearly, high and strained: "I thought I'd let you know right off, Senator. He was riding the pasture this afternoon when it happened. He ought to known to be careful riding that old roan down hill. It looks like he bolted with Pop, Senator, and thrown him off against a rock yonder on the slope. He was dead when I found him, Senator, and I brung him home in the wagon. . ."

"Melvin, it's too bad," Amon said. "It's a great shock to me, Melvin."

When he hung up the receiver Amon sat silent beneath the stained glass in the faint light. Olivia hovered near him and between them there was the uneasy silence of unspoken thoughts, the tense intimacy of tragedy.

"He was a good man, Olivia," Amon said at last. "I knew his father well."

Amon stood up and went slowly to the stairs, and quietly Olivia put one hand on his arm, supporting him, as they climbed the stairs together.

"I never thought I'd outlive him," Amon said. "I never did. It brings things home to me, Olivia. When somebody dies it makes you think how time has gone by. It makes you remember. . ."

He left her at the door of his room and went over to the bed. He sat on the edge of the bed with his hands clasped between his knees and his back turned to the windows, thinking that age comes to a man when he turns to the obituary columns in the newspapers, when death makes him contemplative, when the

past is sweeter than anything to come. Amon sat on the bedside remembering the years of his life as a scene viewed at twilight, thinking of the fall of 1876 when he had first seen Dennis Coleman, a tow-headed boy by a log-fire in the moonlit night on the prairie. Indians had ridden on moonlit nights then to steal horses, and raiding Kiowas had swept down on the log house Coleman's father had built on Soapstone Creek ; they had scalped his mother, and the boy had been sitting wide-eyed and not fully comprehending by the fireside. Now the state highway, broad as a Texas river and marked with white lines, passed within a hundred yards of where the log house had stood nearly sixty years ago. Automobiles raced by a fifty miles an hour and mail planes droned overhead, their lights winking in the night.

Dennis Coleman had been a symbol of Amon's opportunism. Later, when the Kiowa chiefs Satotan and Big Nose were captured and brought to trial for murder, Amon had called the boy as a witness, to clinch his case by a sentimental appeal to the jury. Very clearly he could see now that the trial had been the controlling factor in his life ; he had known it when he had framed the Indian arrows and hung them in a glass case in his study. He had recognized, tacitly and through his conscience, an obligation to the Coleman family, and he had moved them to the ranch on Briar Creek when he bought it. But in fifty-seven years an obligation should be discharged ; he had considered it a new beginning when Dennis Coleman returned to him penniless from the oil fields, with his hat in hand, asking for Amon's aid. But now the long intervening years had been compressed by Coleman's death and Amon saw again the booming range years of the eighties, the days of soaring values and of high beef prices in which the Colemans had participated with him. He saw again the days of expectancy and ambition when the Southwest world was rising like a sunflower tall and straight to the sun, not as now choked with weeds. Now Amon felt that he was losing the last contacts with that past which had become so suddenly the past on the death of his wife twenty years ago. For thirty years he had identified his life with hers, and when he felt the lack of her to complement him he had first turned his eyes back

again in thinking of her, in remembering their life together. Since then how strongly the passage of time had left its impress ; the picture in his mind was a pale sepia tintype fading into blankness. Her death had come gradually, after an illness, and there had been slow months of readjustment in anticipation of it, an instinctive strengthening of himself. Now the abrupt, the unexpected, shocked Amon in Coleman's death. He was unable to sleep and he sat for a long time in the moonlight. He ran his hands over his knees. They were brittle knobs. His shanks were skinny and the skin flabby on them, a blue-tinted white. His body was old, and there was no longer confidence in its functions. Even from sitting erect his neck began to ache and after a time he stretched himself out on the bed. His body was stiff and weary, but his mind raced actively ; he could not close his eyes on his thoughts. Boyd Coleman had been a good cattle-man, able to think for himself ; his son Dennis was less efficient, more dependent, and Melvin — Melvin was shiftless, Amon thought. He had to be told what to do. He had no initiative. — With Melvin in charge of the ranch Amon would have to superintend it closely ; it would be a constant care to him. And lying on the bed, looking at the shifting moonlight on the ceiling, Amon felt a sudden anger, thinking that again there was this obligation to the Coleman family. He would have to keep Melvin on the ranch ; he was obliged to, as he had been obliged to take Dennis back when he had returned in his wagon from the oil fields. . . .

Olivia drove Amon to the funeral two days later. Dr. Valentine had ordered him to avoid any activity that made him nervous and had said : "Senator, it's not safe for a man your age to drive a car."

"Nonsense," Amon had cried. "I can look out for myself."

"I'm thinking of the other people on the road, Senator," Dr. Valentine had said with a laugh.

It was very hot in the small church of the village of Briar Forks, on a side road three miles from the ranch, and Amon sat stiffly in the straight-backed pew with a handkerchief tied around his neck above his starched collar. He was frowning and un-

comfortable and had hardly a word to say to the townspeople who greeted him after the services. They went to the cemetery for the interment and stood beside Melvin and his small brother at the grave. As they were walking back to the car among the simple headstones, Melvin said : "Why, it wasn't two weeks ago that Pop was here for the spring graveyard working, Senator, hoeing weeds."

"It happened mighty sudden, Melvin," Amon said. "You all come along and we'll drive you back to the ranch."

Melvin and Clinton sat in the back seat, Melvin with his long legs sprawled out, his red face now relaxing its tense expression.

"I don't blame it on that old roan horse," he said. "I don't really blame him."

When they reached the ranch-house Amon peered at Clinton keenly and nodded his head. "You know, that boy, with his tow hair, he looks just like your father when he was a boy, Melvin."

"Does he now, Senator?"

"The image — doesn't he, Olivia?"

"Well, Papa, I never saw Dennis as a boy," she said, her lips drawing in at the corners.

"No, of course." Amon gave her a quick, frowning glance. "Of course not. But sometimes, Olivia, I forget that you're not as old as I am."

They went to the piazza of the ranch-house and Amon sat in a rocking chair, with a straw between his teeth, and looked out at the windmill and the chicken-house near it. Once his wife had raised turkeys on the ranch. They had foraged on the prairie for grasshoppers and Melvin had driven them in at sunset with a long whip to snap in the weeds. The turkey chicks had been kept in the house by the windmill, an old log house with a puncheon floor and a chimney of rocks that had been built when Amon bought the ranch over fifty years ago.

"Melvin, what sort of shape is that chicken-house in?"

"Why, it's all right, Senator. That there house was built to stand. It's as sturdy as this new ranch-house, I reckon."

"I want to take a look at it," Amon said, and stood up. Mel-

vin went with him through the dusty Bermuda grass to the old log house. The door creaked when he pulled it open. The hinges were rusted and one had come loose, causing the door to sag. The floor of axe-marked logs was crusted with the stains of many fowl. The windows had been nailed shut and it was breathless in the house. Amon took off his hat and fanned his face, looking at the walls and the rafters overhead.

"This house ain't been used in a long time, Senator," Melvin said. "Pop had some hens in it a couple of years ago, before he built the chicken coop yonder."

"Yes, it looks in good condition," Amon said. "It could be fixed up with a little elbow work."

In the open air again Amon breathed deep of the plains breeze and Melvin stood with his hands in the pockets of his trousers. He was stiff and unnatural in his black trousers and white shirt, with the unaccustomed necktie, with his yellow shoes and spotless Stetson hat reserved for Sundays.

"Well, Melvin, I suppose you want to stay here on the ranch," Amon said.

"Yes, Senator." Melvin looked up at him anxiously. "I'd shore like to."

"Let's go back to the house."

Melvin followed him through the tall grass and sat on the edge of the piazza at Amon's feet. There was a long pause, and Melvin sat tickling his palm with a straw, waiting for the old man to speak. At length Amon said, looking out across the prairie: "I taught your father all he knew about the cattle business, Melvin."

"Yes, I know you did, Senator. I shore do."

"Your father was a fine man."

"Yes." Melvin swallowed. "It don't seem like only two weeks ago that we was all out to the graveyard to hoe weeds. Pop was in fine fettle then. I never seen him eat so hearty."

"It must have been a great shock to you, Melvin," Olivia said quietly.

"Yes, ma'am. I never thought two weeks ago I'd be a-buryin' Pop. — It was a fine graveyard workin' this year and Pop enjoyed

it. My, we had a lot to eat that day, all right. I tell you, Senator, my gal is shore a fine cook. You ought to et some of that fried chicken she brung." Melvin smiled.

"Have you got a girl, Melvin?" Olivia asked.

"Yes, ma'am." Melvin looked up at her. "I been courtin' Blossom Eckley. — Her paw owns a farm the other side of Briar Forks, ma'am. It looks as if we're goin' to git married."

"Is that so, Melvin?" Amon pursed his lips.

"Yes, Senator. She said she would."

"You want to settle down, I reckon, Melvin."

"I shore do. I want to settle down and have seven sons, Senator, to do the work when I start aging." Melvin laughed.

"Maybe that's just what you need," Amon said. "Yes, I guess if you settled down with a wife I might make a cattleman of you yet, Melvin."

"I'll try, Senator."

"Yes, but I'll have to watch over you pretty close, Melvin," Amon said. "I'll have to come out to the ranch pretty often to see you take care of things right." He began to rock slowly. "Now, Melvin, I gave your father thirty dollars a month and his share of the crops, but he had two sons to help him. Of course you ain't worth that much."

"No, I guess I ain't, Senator."

"I'll give you half the crops you raise, though," Amon said. "And I'll pay you ten dollars a month to help with your keep. . . But you've got to work hard, Melvin. You've got to earn that money."

"I will, Senator."

"I want things done right. I want the fences looked after and the cattle tended careful. I'm going to have to supervise you, and I'm going to come out here often — for several days at a clip when I can spare the time." Amon rolled the straw in his loose lips. "I reckon Olivia and I will need the ranch-house to live in, Melvin."

Melvin looked up and Olivia turned toward her father with her mouth slightly open.

"Now look at that chicken-house," Amon said. "Look at it,

Olivia. Would you believe that was built fifty-five years ago? Well, it was. We had that built, your grandfather and I, when we first bought this property, and the rocks for that chimney came right yonder from Briar Creek. That house was built to stand, and you know, there ain't a nail in it. It's as sturdy now as it was in 1879, ain't it, Melvin?"

"It's strong, all right."

"All it needs is a little elbow work, a little soap and water and a coat of whitewash on the walls and it will be as good as new," Amon said. "Melvin, do you reckon you can do the job?"

"You mean clean it up, Senator?"

"Yes."

"Why, shore I can."

"It's roomy inside," Amon said. "It's got two rooms there, Olivia. — It was roomy enough for your grandfather, Melvin, and for your father, too. I reckon it's big enough for you, ain't it?"

"You mean to live in, Senator?"

"Yes, of course."

"It looks like it's about ready to fall apart, Papa," Olivia said. "And it's been a chicken-house since I can remember."

"Nonsense. It's strong as an oak tree," Amon said. "All it needs is a good cleaning and maybe a slap-dash of paint. What do you think, Melvin?"

"I reckon it could be fixed up, Senator. I reckon it could be made to do."

"Sure it can, if you work at it. — Yonder's the home for your bride, Melvin. You'll be as snug as a bug in a rug there."

"We can make out in it," Melvin said slowly, leaning over to pick up a dried pecan husk, his head turned away. "I think I'll go take another look at it, Senator."

He walked away slowly across the ranch yard and Olivia sat looking after him, at his bent head and sloping shoulders.

"Papa, that's a disappointment to the boy. He was planning on the ranch-house for his bride. I suppose they've talked together about it."

"Olivia," Amon Hall frowned. "A man has to make his

own way in the world. He can't expect things ready-made. His father was glad to live in that house, and his grandfather, too."

"But that was over fifty years ago, Papa."

"Well, the house hasn't changed any — and it was good enough for them." Amon spat his straw to the floor. "Olivia, I've got to spend a lot of time out here. This ranch needs looking after. Somebody has to superintend it, and if Clay won't do it I guess it's up to me."

"I wish you'd let up on Clay, Papa," Olivia said, sighing.

II

THE sedan chair tossed in the narrow street and the wooden face of the saint looked down on the close mass of people, the red-coated soldiers with white cross-belts, the flaring muzzles of the blunderbusses. The aged elegance of the saint's robes was a rich and shaded color beneath the canopy of the sedan chair ; in the tossing, in the jolting and the bouncing, the saint sat stiff and imperturbable, unbending, and somewhat ludicrous in the assault upon his static dignity. Twelve steps down through the crowd, down the steep hill, over the cobblestones, then the sedan chair was tossed high again, the chant went up from many voices and there came a thunderous volley from the six blunderbusses, a noise rebounding from the close walls of the houses, seeming in its power to carry far away across the harbor, over the sunlit Mediterranean to Africa. And as the saint progressed down the hill toward the port and the sea the crowd was a tighter mass in front of the scarlet-cloaked soldiers with their tri-cornered hats, blocking the soldiers who in the legend of the *fête de La Bravade* were barring the path of Saint Tropez to the sea.

The crowd ringed the tableau of soldiers and sedan chair and the stiff wooden saint in his faded robes ; the crowd pressed in, waiting for each volley, joining in the chant, and it seemed that one could mingle with it and lose identity in the impersonal, joyous spirit of the *fête*. It seemed to Hilda James, standing

in a narrow doorway, one hand against the stone doorcase, that the levelling spirit of the *fête* could balance off individual cares, personal worries, if only she could forget them and mingle with the crowd. If only she could lose her identity in the crowd, for a day, an hour ; if she could follow Saint Tropez in triumph to the sea. If only she could forget Hilda James and her fear and the reason for her flight to Saint Tropez, the reason for this spectre of a holiday which had brought her by train and bus eighty kilometers from Cannes for the *fête de La Bravade*. Standing in the doorway, her hand against the cold stone, Hilda James said : "I've been a God damned fool," and she thought that never would anyone have a hold on her again, never again would she reveal herself, would she expose herself. In the beginning he had called for her in the afternoons among the formal pillars of the Place des Vosges ; they had walked together, talked together, danced together. *Hilda*, he had said, *you are the only American girl I have ever met with a spirit altogether Continental, cosmopolitan*. I've learned to take care of myself, if that's what you mean. *You're self-sufficient, yes. You're independent. But what I mean, Hilda, is that you are a sophisticate, by instinct.* What a clever approach, Hilda thought now. She had been pleased, even flattered ; after that she had made a point of knowing what wine to ask for at dinner, what liqueur to order afterwards. Had the only appeal been that of an educative process, a feminine desire to adapt and readjust ?

Again the deafening volley of the blunderbusses ; again the tossing sedan chair, directly in front of Hilda now. The jewels of the saint's robes, the rich embroidery, were brilliant against the golden gray of the ancient cloth ; the sad wooden face of the saint looked down at her.

Finally, on the Rue Cambon, outside the Ritz bar, she had known, then. I'm going to Cannes for a holiday, she had said. *Cannes, Hilda ? My God, the season's over there. Cannes is simply shabby in summer.* Well, Antibes then, anywhere. *Hilda, I think you're running away from me.* Will you call me a taxi ? No, Hilda, please. . . How artificial the Mediter-

ranean can be in the brilliant light of summer, with red-gold rocks and dark green hills and water as blue as paint squeezed fresh from a tube marked cerulean. How like a picture post-card and how distant from reality. Hilda had felt removed from it as now, standing in the doorway, she felt removed from the crowd packed wall to wall in the narrow, cobbled street. The crowd surged about her, close against her as the sedan chair passed, and Hilda was pressed into the doorway, hemmed in, hearing the lifting chant, waiting for the inevitable discharge of the blunderbusses. Now the crowd oppressed her ; suddenly she felt that she must get away again to quiet streets, away from the noise and the chanting and the formalized ritual of the *fête*. *La fête de La Bravade* — *la bravade*, the defiant word now did not fit her mood as it had when she had taken the taxicab on the Rue Cambon side of the Ritz. Now she was lonely and afraid ; there was no bravado in her.

Hilda left the doorway and began to move along the wall, her feet in the shallow gutter against the wall, down the street toward the port, squeezing along through the crowd. She drew even again with the sedan chair ; forward progress had stopped and she saw the red-coated soldiers whirling, their faces pink, their cross-belts a white blur. Then the blunderbusses were raised again ; smoke puffed from the flaring muzzles and the great noise echoed from the overhanging eaves. Hilda was pressed against the wall, panting. She put her hands before her, pushing against a man's back, at length eased herself past him. Ahead of her she saw a face above the crowd, the young face of a tall man who was inches above the crowd. He was watching her and smiling as she forced her way forward. Now she remembered that she had seen him before, opposite her as she stood in the doorway, opposite her as the sedan chair and the outraged wooden saint passed between them.

"Are you trying to get out of here ?" he called to her, in English.

"Yes."

He pushed forward and they were against the wall together. Now the tri-cornered hats were spinning ; she saw the bell-shaped

mouths of the blunderbusses up-raised. The volley crashed against her ears.

"Down to the port?" He was shouting.

Hilda nodded and he went ahead of her, along the gutter, forcing his way, calling occasionally, "Pardon, Monsieur, je demande pardon." She pressed close behind him and foot by foot they made their way along the wall. Behind them the sedan chair swayed high in the air; behind them the blunderbusses of the British exploded noise, behind them the austere wooden saint submitted to his annual indignity. Then they came out suddenly into sunlight. In the narrow street, but for the dazzling sky, it had seemed a dark day. They came into sunlight and he took her arm, turning toward the port with fishing vessels at the quay, with the long gray shape of a destroyer anchored off shore.

"Thank God that's over," Hilda said. She stopped to smooth her dress, to straighten the wide brim of her straw hat. The spring dress was of silk, widely striped in blue and pale blue and cut on the bias so that the stripes seemed to continue the lateral motion of the wind as it blew the skirt about her legs. He stood looking at her; his face was tanned and he wore a beret.

"It takes them hours to bring that saint down to the sea," he said. "He's supposed to fight his way through the British troops and they practically fire shot for shot in the ceremony."

"Thanks for rescuing me," Hilda said.

"The best way to watch this *fête* is to sit at that *café* on the quay and drink champagne cocktails and wait until they reach the sea."

They were walking again over the smooth blocks of the quay. Sunlight gleamed on the tables of the *café*, on the marble table-tops, on the glasses and the silver and the bald head of a waiter who stood beside the potted hedge, his face red against the shiny green leaves.

"I came to the *fête* of la Bravade once before, two years ago, and I know. It was a long time before we discovered this *café* and the champagne cocktails and by that time they'd killed a thousand English at least."

They sat at a table in the front row, before them the quay and the ships at their moorings, beyond the still clear waters of the bay, the long green shore line.

"Two champagne cocktails," he said to the bald waiter, and turned to her. "My name is Clayton Hall."

"Hilda James."

"You mean that's your name — Hilda James ?"

"Yes."

"You're a monosyllabic girl, aren't you ?"

"I am today. I'm sorry." She moved her shoulders slightly.

The bald waiter set the champagne cocktails before them, taking the glasses from the tray with a sweeping motion of one deferential arm.

"These will make you talk," Clay said.

"I don't want to talk." She raised her glass and sipped the cocktail, looking out across the bay. Far in the distance there was a flash of silver.

"A swordfish," Clay said, meeting her eyes.

They watched the still surface of the water. Again there came a diamond flash, a great fish leaping clear of the water, writhing up toward the sky, plunging again into the warm sea. Again and again the fish leaped, a hundred yards between each emergence, a hundred yards nearer the open sea, a hundred yards farther away from them as they sat on the quay with the noise of the blunderbusses coming in regular periods to their ears. And the swordfish leaped at intervals as regular as the volleys, clear of the water, its long silver shape reflecting sunlight like a heliograph, its tail and body twisting, its long-bladed nose rigid as a handle by which an unseen hand jerked the fish from the water.

Hilda sighed. For a moment she had again had the illusion of escaping herself, but the fish had plunged from sight forever ; the waters of the bay were still again, still and very blue, and reflected the glaring light.

"I keep looking around, waiting for someone to come and claim you," Clay said. "Are you with anyone ?"

"No, I'm alone."

"Do you live in Saint Tropez ?"

"No." She felt him watching her, looked up with a start. "No, I'm just here for the *fête*. I came yesterday afternoon and I'm going back today."

"Back where?"

"To Cannes."

"I'm on my way to Cagnes."

"That hill town where so many painters live?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you paint?"

"Yes." Clay called to the waiter. "Encore deux champagne coquetels."

"Tell me," Hilda said suddenly. "Do you know this part of France well, I mean Cannes and Nice?"

"Fairly well, why?"

The waiter put the glasses before them, removing the empty ones, and Hilda reached for hers at once.

"I've lived four years in France," Clay said. "Paris, Avignon, here along the Riviera. I've just come from Avignon. I've been there a week, peacefully, painting a little and drinking Tavel and playing cards at night with the *chef de gare* and the local grave-digger." He looked at her, at her arched nose and full chin, her blonde hair feathery in the sunlight. "Why do you ask?"

"I wanted to ask you something, but never mind." Hilda frowned, thinking that it had been foolish to leave Paris, to leave a cosmopolitan city where everything was possible, to take that dreary, dreadful second-class trip to the south, sitting opposite a well-fed priest in the dining car, feeling ill again as he ate great mouthfuls of trout, drinking *Grave*. From the window of the dining car she had looked out at Avignon and the Rhône.

"I went through Avignon on the train," she said. "It seemed an ugly city."

"It isn't."

"I didn't even see the *Pont d'Avignon*."

"You see little of Avignon from the train." He waited an instant as the blunderbusses boomed, nearer now. "You're not in a very good mood for a *fête*, are you?"

"I suppose I'm not. Do you know when the next bus leaves for Saint Raphael? I want to get back to Cannes before too late."

"I can drive you to Cannes."

"It's not in your way, is it?"

"It's directly in my way."

"But you want to stay for the *fête*."

"I've seen this *fête* before."

They looked at each other, and Hilda picked up her glass.

"If we start soon we can drive over the Corniche d'Or," Clay said. "We can see the cliffs and the sea and the forest of the Estérel. The mimosa is in flower now."

"All right." Hilda drank the rest of her champagne cocktail.

"Where are you things?"

"At the Hôtel de France."

"Then why don't you go and get ready and I'll bring the car around."

"Yes, I'll only need five minutes." She stood up, and Clay signalled to the waiter. While he was paying she walked on down the quay, holding her straw hat against the wind, the oblique stripes of her dress wrapped about her body. She turned up a narrow, cobbled street of the old town toward her hotel. She walked more lightly now ; she walked eagerly, her high heels clicking on the cobbles. There was something else again to think of, again an interlude before her, again a blessed moment of delay. In her room in the hotel she hurriedly packed her overnight bag ; she could not too soon escape the silent musty room with its creaky bed and corpse-like bolster, its flowered wallpaper and chipped furniture. She saw herself reflected in a pier glass against the wall, a mirror which seemed to have individuality of its own, to be almost animate as it waited against the wall to magnify the pressure of externals, to make of the one oppressive room two rooms with two canopied beds, two chiffoniers, two enamel-covered *bidets*. What relief there was to hear the high soft sound of an automobile horn outside, to run to the window and look down over a grilled balcony at Clay in the car below her, his face turned up to her, smiling and waving

one hand. She caught up the overnight case and ran down the stairs. She had already paid her bill ; she ran past the *patron* and out into the street where Clay was waiting. He tossed her bag in the tonneau, held open the door for her. And when they were settled in the front seat, when he had started the engine, she looked at him and said : "I'm glad you came along. You know, I've been a lonely woman." His answering smile, his glance, seemed understanding, and Hilda sank back against the cushion, relaxed, her hands folded in her lap. They slowly descended the cobbled street, coming out on the quay as the blunderbusses sounded again like thunder off to the right. Far at the end of the quay Hilda saw a close spot of red, the white-belted soldiers.

"Farewell to Saint Tropez," she said. "Goodbye, La Bravade."

"Goodbye, champagne cocktails," Clay said. "We should have had another one. We'd better stop in Fréjus, or Saint Raphael."

"By that time, yes. You know, I do feel much, much better."

"You look better."

"I was very low when you came along. I was up on the hill wishing one of those soldiers would shoot me with his blunderbuss."

"You didn't come to Saint Tropez to get yourself shot with a blunderbuss, did you ?"

"No, I came for a holiday, to see the fête."

"A holiday from what ?"

Hilda met his glance, then looked again at the road, at the brilliant blue water. "From Cannes," she said, and she became silent again, with again the aching constriction at her heart, the taut muscles of fear. She looked out at the sea, half turned away from him, as they drove rapidly along the coast. He talked a little and her answers were only the brief necessities of conversation. They went through the old Roman town of Fréjus, and at Saint Raphael took the road by the sea, along the coast, along beside the cliffs, to Cannes. The road wound among ilex trees and cedars ; through them occasionally was seen the bright stucco of a villa, the Mediterranean beyond. Sometimes the road curved around cliffs of sheer red and purple rock,

the sea far below. The air was fragrant, and often they came upon the brilliant yellow of mimosa, caught its scent.

"Have you gone back into your shell again?" Clay asked after a long time. They were passing through the town of Agay, on a road running just beside the sea.

"I'm looking at the water — I've never been along this coast road before."

"How long have you been in Cannes?"

"Just a week. — I came away to be off by myself." Hilda sighed. "But I don't like it. It's frightening to be alone."

"Frightening?"

"Oh, I mean — but I'm not going to bore you with my troubles." She opened her handbag and took out a cigarette.

"Light me one too," Clay said.

She struck a match, bent forward behind the shelter of the windshield, and lit two cigarettes. She gave one to Clay and as he took it he pressed her hand. "Go ahead — tell me about it."

"There's nothing to tell you." She frowned and raised the cigarette to her lips. Abruptly she said: "That's a nice town, isn't it?"

They had turned around the base of a tall cliff and, still high above the sea, looked down on a town below, on a small white beach and a stucco hotel and a precise square of a fishing village. On the slope of the hill across the valley there were several villas above the sea, opposite them a small white house with a rock garden descending the hillside.

"That would be a pleasant place to live," Hilda said.

"In that white villa? Yes. From there you could see across the bay of Cannes. We're only fifteen kilometers from Cannes now."

"Cannes again," Hilda sighed. "I don't want to go back there. I never want to see Cannes again."

"Well, is there any reason why you have to go to Cannes?"

"None in particular."

"Then why don't you try Nice, or Villefranche, or Monte Carlo?"

She shook her head.

"Then come to Cagnes. There's a pleasant hotel there, high up on the hill, perched on the hillside like a spider. I'm going to stay there. A friend of mine, a poet, left Paris ahead of me for Avignon, but I missed him there. Probably he's in Cagnes now."

"I think I'll go back to Paris," Hilda said. "Perhaps that's the best thing for me to do."

Clay slowed the car suddenly at a crossroads and took a road to the left, away from the sea.

"Where are you going?"

"I just remembered a little restaurant about a mile down this road. They make excellent champagne cocktails, in a large glass with orange and pineapple like a fruit punch."

"All right."

Clay drove rapidly. They passed the race track, went through a village, and at length came to a small orange-colored building set back under the trees. Clay turned off the road and stopped the car under an oak tree. There was no one in the tiny bar-room of the restaurant. They sat down on high stools and Clay rapped on the wood until a waiter came in sleepily from the kitchen.

"Deux champagne cocktails," Clay said.

They watched the waiter mix them; a lump of sugar in each glass, browned with bitters and crushed, then slices of orange and pineapple and finally champagne.

"These are really good," Clay said. "I lived in Cannes for several months a long time ago and I've remembered them ever since."

"Where haven't you lived in France, Clay?"

"Well, I've wasted away four years here, you know."

The waiter sat down at the other end of the bar and opened a copy of the *Nice l'Eclaireur*. They sat in the twilight in the silent barroom, drinking several cocktails, and then suddenly Hilda found herself talking, telling all that she had kept pent within her. Clay had said suddenly: "Tell me, have you tried the simple remedies?"

"Now what are you talking about?"

"About you."

Hilda looked quickly away from him, out the window at the oak trees and the gray street.

"I've listened to you, I've watched you," Clay said. "You said you were in trouble. You said you were frightened at being alone. All day your eyes have looked like gray mice, hunting for a place to hide. You haven't laughed once."

She did laugh then, but suddenly she was angry at his casual, flippant manner. They had been talking in whispers, their elbows touching on the bar. She raised her head and color burned in her cheeks. "Why are you so curious? Why don't you let me alone?"

"Oh, now," Clay said, and after a pause. "I'm sorry."

"I don't like to be dissected." She picked up her glass.

"It was none of my business, I know. — Let's have another drink."

"But you're right. You guessed right, and I'm scared as hell." She struck her knuckles on the bar, then turned toward him. Her voice dropped to a whisper and her smoky gray eyes were intently fixed on his face. "I thought I was brave, and that's why I went away alone, that's why I came to Cannes. But I haven't any guts, I guess. I'm lost. I don't know what to do. I've tried everything — gin, *pillules de l'époque* — everything. I used to walk my room in my hotel in Paris and turn handsprings like an *adagio* dancer. It sounds silly. I thought I was pretty worldly, and maybe if I'd been in America — I didn't know what to do, but I did know I wanted to go somewhere else because it seemed that in any other place but where I was a miracle might somehow happen."

"I know that feeling," Clay said.

"If I were brave, if I had any courage at all, I suppose I'd go through with it. But I can't do that." She turned her glass around in a wet spot on the bar. "I never want to get involved with anyone again for the rest of my life."

"That's the beginning of wisdom," Clay said. "Listen, when I was down here a year or so ago — I remember it was in March

and it rained all that month, there was an English bank clerk in the pension I stayed at, a quiet fellow with a pale face and high collars. He worked in a bank and he had to be discreet. He had a duplicate latch key made for the front door of the pension and he used to slip quietly in before dawn. No one even suspected, though some nights he made a hell of a noise stumbling up the stairs and awakened the dear little English spinsters who used to twitter around us because we were the only young men in the place. It was one of those funeral pensions — the mausoleum of poor English relations stretching their pounds into francs, and the electricity was turned off at eleven every night so that the old girls couldn't read late and drop off to sleep over their Tauchnitz novels and leave the light burning. Even the minuterie was turned off." The glasses were empty and Clay called to the waiter. Hilda sat silent, watching him.

"Well, to get to the point," Clay said. "He simply looked up all the sages-femmes in the bottin, the classified directory, and went around to interview them. A few doors were slammed in his face, but he found one in the end."

"What's a sage-femme?"

"A mid-wife."

"Oh."

"Well, there's one solution."

"I don't think I'd like that."

"No, I don't think you would."

"I mean I'd be scared. I wouldn't trust her."

"Of course it's dangerous, but that's something you have to decide for yourself. Probably it would be better to go back to Paris."

"No, I'm going to stay here."

"Well, if you want to do something about it, you might look around, anyhow. I'll help you find someone, and if you're afraid you don't have to go on with it."

"You'll help me? But I don't want to mix you up in it, Clay, just because you feel sorry for me."

"Oh, I'll do what I can to help, and anyhow, I'm partial to blondes with gray eyes." He smiled.

"It isn't right to drag you into it. — But I suppose I knew I was going to when I talked to you in Saint Tropez. I had to ask someone."

"What motives women have," Clay said, looking at her curiously. "Now listen, Nice is a drab, bourgeois city. Let's don't go there. Why don't we drive back along the coast to Toulon ? That's a seaport town, a naval base, and it ought to be easy. Tell me, have you any more baggage ?"

"Yes, at my hotel."

"Then let's get it."

"You mean now ?"

"Yes, right away. We can drive to Toulon tonight."

"Tonight ? Oh, Clay, I was frightened before because nothing had happened and now it all happens so suddenly. I'm really scared. Why not wait until tomorrow ?"

"No, we'll go tonight," Clay said decisively. "By tomorrow the suspense at least will be over. Let's have another champagne cocktail."

III

HILDA JAMES sat on the *terrasse* of a café on the quay at Toulon, to her right the square gray shape of the naval arsenal. She sat alone at a table in the sunlight, looking out at the hull of a destroyer which seemed to dance though the haze of heat-light on the harbor beyond the breakwater. Part of the French fleet had put in at the Toulon naval base and the harbor was *en fête* for the navy. Streamers blew from the mastheads of the harbor craft and the cement quay was crowded with bootblacks and beggars, matrons and fishwives, Senegalese and Arab soldiers, and swarthy laborers who were obviously descendants of the Moors who had given the coast east of Toulon the name of *Côte des Maures*. Hilda sat watching the crowd, watching the red pom-poms of the sailors moving like toy balloons among the people. Actively life went on about her, but she sat alone at the table, waiting with unbearable tension until Clay should return. When she was with him there was relief, there was a sense of guidance that comforted her, so suddenly, so completely

had she accepted his protection. How far in the past now seemed the booming blunderbusses of *La Bravade*, how distant the loneliness and uncertainty. If, in Paris, *he* had shown the same directness and understanding that Clay had, the same subtle domination which a woman needed, how much easier it would have been. But there had always been the gracelessness, the restraint, in both of them ; nothing had been natural and open between them. To sit now in the sunshine, watching the clear bright colors, the distinct outlines of the buildings along the quay, was to absorb the airy light into her brain, to clear her thoughts, immeasurably to relieve her. The harbor of Toulon was spread before her in the *Midi* sun, the murmurous voice of the crowd came to her ears, and now it seemed that she had never seen a more gentle, friendly city. But still she felt alien to it, and to herself ; a stranger to the Hilda James whose father owned a garage in the green hills of New Hampshire, who a year ago had come to France to study design, to guard her francs in *prix fixe* restaurants where the purple ink was blotted on the menus, to walk through endless corridors of museums, to look at shop windows on the Rue de Rivoli and in the Place Vendôme, to enjoy the simple daytime pleasures which were open to a girl alone in Paris.

Clay sat down suddenly beside her and she glanced up, startled, the irises of her gray eyes tawny and alive in her face. She had not seen him approach along the quay. He looked at her, pleased by the glowing color of her hair and the rose-colored shadow cast on the green iron table by the glass of vermouth beside her hand. He said abruptly : "Let's have a drink."

"But tell me . . ."

"Let's have a drink first." Clay called to the waiter, "Garçon, deux fines à l'eau."

"Clay, can't you talk without drinking ?"

"This drink is for you."

"But Clay, have you done anything ?"

"Yes, I did exactly what we planned, and that's all you need to know. We'll go there and you can form your own impressions and decide for yourself."

"You found someone?"

"Yes, in the classified directory."

The waiter put the glasses on the table and sprayed charged water into them from a siphon. He was bald and his face and scalp dripped with perspiration. He moved hurriedly, anxious to return to the shade of the awning, out of the *Midi* sun.

"We have a little time," Clay said. "Let's take a boat out to see the fleet."

"What do you mean we have a little time? — You mean before we go there?"

"That's right. Her name is Madame Jouvert."

"Yes, but what's she like? Clay, is she safe?"

"You'll see for yourself." He looked at her. "Hilda, I found her for you, the rest you have to decide for yourself. I'm not going to influence you one way or another."

"But I don't want to decide for myself." Her eyes were green from the reflection of sunlight on the iron table. "You scare me talking like that."

Clay looked away from her. It was hot on the *terrasse* and the harbor had quieted in the midday sunlight. Pennants drooped from the ratlines of small boats along the quay and the boatmen lounged in the bows of their boats, beside the signs which said *Excursions à la rade; voir la flotte*. A naval tender, putting out from the quay by the arsenal, was the only moving object within the breakwater. Over the still water came the high-pitched voices of the sailors, who looked like monkeys in the swaying tenders, with their red pom-poms bobbing. *

Clay glanced at Hilda, saw her flushed face, the stabbing highlight on the tip of her up-tilted nose. Her hair was the color of mimosa in the sunlight, feathery like mimosa.

"Now don't worry," he said softly.

"But I am worried. I'm frightened."

"Let's go see the fleet."

"That won't help me. No, I'd jump overboard." She turned to him with a brief, strained smile.

"Then drink your brandy."

Hilda obediently raised her glass and he said: "As far as I

can see this woman's all right. Of course it's taking a chance, you know that."

"Yes."

"You have to decide whether you want to take it or not."

"I've got to do it, Clay. I wish you wouldn't talk to me like that."

"I know." He put one hand over hers, on the green table. "What you want is sympathy, Hilda. You want someone to tell you what to do, don't you?"

"Yes."

"But I can't do that. It's entirely up to you. You have to consider it and decide whether you want to go ahead, and you can do it after you've seen Madame Jouvert. Why not forget about it until then?"

"I can't forget it. — It *has* been such a long time, Clay."

"Yes, I know. Let's have another drink, Hilda."

"No."

"Then let's have another drink somewhere else."

"All right. Yes, let's go somewhere else."

"Garçon, l'addition, s'il vous plaît."

"Oui, Monsieur." The fat waiter came reluctantly into the sunlight. "Ça fait huit francs, Monsieur. . . Merci, Monsieur, merci beaucoup — On va voir la flotte, Monsieur?"

"Peut-être." Clay took Hilda's arm and they went out to the quay. "Do you want to see the fleet?"

"No, absolutely not."

"What would you like to see? the cathedral then?"

"No."

Ahead of them cargo was being unloaded from a small Greek freighter; they heard quick bursts of spinning noise from the donkey-engines. The hull of the boat was patched with red lead, a brilliant color against the gray wall of a warehouse behind it. They turned off the quay, away from the harbor and the stabbing reflection of sunlight on the water. They walked along the narrow Rue Amiral-Sénès and paused at a fountain, listening to the flow of water into a mossy basin, now in the deep soft shade of a eucalyptus tree with the street ahead of

them splashed in sunlight. They lingered for only a moment, and Clay's pressure on her arm set them in motion again along the narrow street. On a corner Hilda stopped at a shop window, saying : "Clay, you need a new beret."

"This one's all right."

"It's ragged and it's greasy."

"I had to change a tire on the way down from Avignon."

"I'm going to buy you a new one. — Come on."

They went into the shop and Clay stood by, smiling, while she talked to the clerk. "Monsieur vêut un béret, très chic, bleu comme ses yeux." She talked gaily, laughing, moving her slender hands, her long fingers cutting white lines in the dark thick air of the shop. Clay chose the first beret the clerk brought, put it on, and stuffed the old one in his pocket. A moment later they were again in the glaring street and now the laughter had gone out of Hilda ; she was silent and there were deep lines beside her nose.

They were only a block from their hotel, on a side street behind the theatre, and they turned toward it.

"We'd better have one more drink," Clay said, and they went into the restaurant of the hotel, sat down at a table in the empty room. There were many vacant tables around them, on which stood the bottles of partly-consumed wine of the *pensionnaires*. A waiter playing *jeu de dames* in a corner of the restaurant slapped the cards on the table and came toward them, slouching ungraciously across the room.

"Deux cognacs," Clay said. "Hilda, after this you'd better go up and pack."

"Pack ?"

"Yes, we'll take your luggage along."

"But, Clay, how long will it be ?"

"I don't know . . . maybe a week."

"A week ? — My God."

"It's not like having a tooth out," Clay said. "Here, drink your brandy."

"The way you ply me with liquor, under ordinary circumstances, I'd wonder about your intentions." Hilda drank the

cognac straight, throwing back her head, her blonde hair ruffling on her shoulders. She put the glass down and jumped to her feet. "All right, wait for me."

Clay watched her walk through the lobby, her high heels ringing on the floor, her ankles swaying. The oblique stripes of her dress were wrapped close to her waist and hips ; her blonde hair flared above her narrow shoulders. Clay sipped the cognac slowly. He sat by the window, looking out at the quiet street, and fifteen minutes later he went up the carpeted stairs to the second floor of the hotel and walked along the hall to Hilda's room. He knocked softly on the door. There was a pause, then her stifled voice, "Entrez. . . Oh, it's you, Clay."

"Yes, are you ready ?"

She nodded. She was sitting on the bed, the counterpane rumpled beneath her. There was a depression in the bolster where her head had been and her hair needed combing. He looked at her eyes, and his lips tightened.

"Clay, I'm losing my nerve."

"Oh, nonsense. There's nothing to worry about."

"But three months is a terribly long time, isn't it ?"

He sat down beside her on the bed. He took her hand and her cold fingers clung tightly to his.

"Clay, I'm not going to do it. I've changed my mind."

"All right."

"Why should I ? It's right to have this child, *isn't* it ? There's nothing wrong about it, *is* there ? I could just call myself Mrs. James, or something. And I'd keep it, too. . . Oh, but Clay, I haven't got the courage. I'm not brave enough. I'm not like a servant girl. I'm not insensitive like a servant girl. — I'm not even brave like a servant girl."

He put his arm around her and quietly patted her shoulder ; she was breathing rapidly.

"Clay, it does things to a woman psychologically, doesn't it ?"

"I don't know. Lots of women have them every year. In Soviet Russia it's not illegal.

"It shouldn't be."

"No."

"Clay, what *shall* I do?"

He looked at her white face, at the two suitcases on the floor by the bureau, on the wine-red carpet.

"I don't know, Hilda."

"Do you think I ought to go through with it? Please say something definite."

"Whichever you do, I'll help you all I can."

Her fingers tightened on his hand. "I suppose I ought to go and talk to this woman at least. — What's her name?"

"Madame Jouvert."

"I suppose I ought to talk to her and ask her advice."

"It wouldn't do any harm."

"No. — Yes, all right, I'll do that. Yes, let's go, Clay, now." She stood up and went to the bureau. Standing in front of the glass she arranged her hair, drawing the comb through it with long quick sweeps. She put powder on her face, applied lipstick.

"I'm so pale," she said, and put a smear of lipstick on each cheek, rubbing it to an even, glowing tone. "Do I look like a sacrificial lamb, Clay?"

"You look like a temple virgin." He picked up the suitcases and they went down the stairs together. As she got into the car Hilda asked: "Clay, am I doing the right thing?" Meeting her pleading eyes he answered quickly, decisively, "Yes, I think you are."

They drove beside the theatre to the Boulevard de Strasbourg and turned left toward the Place de la Liberté, a square of stark, sun-baked ochre earth with dusty benches set under occasional eucalyptus trees. Clay turned off on the Rue Revel, a shaded street leading to the trees of the Jardin Public far ahead. He stopped the car in front of a limestone house a few doors from the corner and Hilda drew a deep breath, looking up at the shuttered windows and at two stone nymphs, twined in seaweed, above the arched doorway. From the distance came the faint treble of automobile horns and the murmur of traffic on the boulevard, but the Rue Revel was silent in the sleepy isolation of early afternoon. They got out of the car and went to the door.

There was a sign : *Mme. Jouvert, Sage-femme. 3ème étage.* They went through the stone arch into a dark hall of cobbles with huge blocks of stone forming the walls, ahead of them a shadowed courtyard. A flight of worn wooden steps led up to the left of the entrance and on the wall beside it was another sign, in gold letters on a faded black field : *Mme. Jouvert, 3ème à gauche.* They walked in silence up the three creaking flights of stairs. The landings were dim, with light seeping through the gray glass of narrow windows as in a chapel, and the third floor hallway was cavelike, dust and silence almost tangible in the air. They faced three doors, on one of them a small black plaque, gold-lettered. Clay jerked the bell-pull and they heard a sound like a distant cowbell.

"What a gloomy place, Clay," Hilda said. In the dark hallway her eyes were round, chatoyant.

They heard the muted sound of footsteps, then the door was opened cautiously, still secured by a chain, and amber light framed the head of an old man. His beard was coarse and yellowed at the tip ; he wore gold-rimmed spectacles and a black felt skullcap.

"Nous avons un rendez-vous avec Madame Jouvert," Clay said.

"Oui, oui. Entrez." The old man slipped the chain and opened the door. They followed him along a hallway and into a musty parlor with stiff brocaded furniture. The old man went away and they heard his carpet slippers slapping on the floor. Hilda looked at Clay and he smiled. The windows were tightly shut, the blinds drawn. Hilda went to one of them and tried to open it, but the sash was stuck fast. Clay lit a cigarette and stood looking at a certificate de sage-femme, framed in glass, which hung on the wall. The smoke of his cigarette ascended in a straight blue line to the ceiling.

Hilda sat down in an Empire chair, looking at the floor. Her fingers were tightly clasped in her lap. She was sitting so when the door opened with a faint, creaking sound and Madame Jouvert entered, with a quick glance at them from black eyes half-veiled by thick, pasty lids. Her hair was built in a black oily

mass high on her head. She stood with her back against the door, her hands clasped before her, looking at them. Her arms were short and fat and joined to her pudgy hands without demarkation at the wrists. Her fingernails were pared to the flesh, Hilda noticed with a slight shudder.

"Alors," Madame Jouvert said at length in a hushed, sibilant voice, and adding with finality, "C'est Madame."

Her eyes turned pointedly to the cigarette in Clay's hand and he crushed it out on the window-sill.

"Asseyez-vous," Madame Jouvert said in the same hushed whisper. She perched on the edge of a chair near the door, with her thick hands lying limp in her lap, and Hilda could not take her eyes from the fat, powerful arms, the pared fingernails. Madame Jouvert's breathing was audible; she spoke with a little whisper through pursed lips: "L'état de Madame est très sérieux." She drew the palm of her hand along the firm but yielding flesh of her forearm. "First we must discuss . . ." she smiled, showing teeth yellow-flecked and tipped with gold. "There is the affair of a small deposit." She paused and when Clay did not speak Hilda said in a still voice, "Whatever you say, Madame."

"Mille francs, peut-être?" Madame Jouvert smiled again.

Hilda opened her handbag and took out a thousand franc note. She placed it on the arm of her chair, and although Madame Jouvert did not come forward, her eyes fastened blacker still on the pastel-tinted note.

"Now," Madame Jouvert said. "What is Madame's name? Since we ~~were~~ to be good friends, I cannot call Madame so formally."

"Hilda James."

"Eelda. And Monsieur?" She turned to Clay, her black eyebrows raised in her milky forehead.

"Clayton Hall."

"Clyeton 'All?" She showed again her gold-tipped teeth in a smile. "And now, Madame, you understand that this is a very serious matter."

"Yes," Hilda said, looking at Clay.

"You understand, when one goes against the law it must never do to say so, not even to one's friends. . . ."

"We understand that," Clay said.

Madame Jouvert nodded, looking steadily at Clay. "Now I have a great deal to talk about with Madame. Three months is a long time, you understand, and we must reflect. Perhaps it would be better if Monsieur 'All went away now."

"Oh no," Hilda's eyes turned wide and gray toward him. "Clay, please stay."

Madame Jouvert smiled and shook her head, stroking one white arm with stubby fingers.

"Monsieur can wait on the corner, in the Place de la Liberté," Madame Jouvert said. "Madame and I will follow in a little minute."

"Have you made up your mind, Hilda?"

"Yes. Oh, I've got to . . . I guess you'd better go, Clay."

"It will only be a moment," Madame Jouvert said. "Madame is in good hands, Monsieur."

Clay went slowly to the door and opened it. He paused, glancing back at Hilda and her blonde hair bright in the sombre room. Madame Jouvert was crossing the room toward her and the thousand franc note, and her wide soft back shut Hilda from view. Clay turned away, and found the old man waiting by the door to open it, and as he went down the stairs to the Rue Revel he remembered Hilda's wide gray eyes, tawny-flecked.

Clay sat on a bench beneath a eucalyptus tree in the Place de la Liberté with his back to the bare yellow stone of the Grand Hotel and looked at the houses across the Boulevard de Strasbourg, now partly in shade. It was quiet in the square; a few yards away a French sailor was dozing on a bench, his chin drooping on his blue and white striped *maillot*, his red pom-pom far forward. In the clear light his brown features were as sharp as a mosaic. Clay sighed and lit a cigarette. It was many days now since he had painted and instinctively his eyes sought out compositions as he looked about him in the square. At Avignon he had painted a few water-colors, but since then he had done nothing. It was time he settled down to work, in the

country, away from the cafés. Perhaps he could find a town along the Côte des Maures ; perhaps he would go to La Pramoussel, where Roger Baron and Alice Rand were living. It was no more than twenty-five or thirty miles from Toulon. There were hill towns along the coast. There were boats, the sea, the long rugged ridge of the coast to be painted.

The French sailor awoke and stood up, brushing his trousers, and Clay's eyes turned quickly to the Rue Revel. He had not thought of Hilda and now he started when he saw her on the shaded street leaning on the arm of the waddling midwife. Even from the distance he observed her pallor. He hurried across the street toward her, and when he approached, Madame Jouvert smiled and said in her hushed voice : "Madame is very fatigued. Call us a taxi."

Clay looked at Hilda. The rouge she had put on her cheeks in the hotel was an alien stain on her white face.

"It's done now, Clay. Now there's nothing else for me to make up my mind about. No more decisions. . ." She smiled briefly. "I'm going to stay at her sister's house."

"For how long ?"

"I just have to stay there and wait . . . I don't know. But anyway, at last, it's off my mind now."

Clay put his hand on her elbow, holding it.

"If Monsieur will please call a taxi."

"That's my car down the street, Madame," Clay said.

"Oh no, a taxi, please. Madame comes to my sister's house as from the station in a taxi. She comes for a visit. And when you call on Madame, Monsieur 'All, please do not bring your automobile. You understand. . ."

"See, you can call on me, Clay," Hilda said.

"You wait here and I'll get your luggage out of the car."

Clay left them in the shade of a eucalyptus tree and walked down the street to the old car. As he was returning he heard Madame Jouvert whistle and saw a taxicab turn in at the curb. When he reached them Madame Jouvert was settled on the cushions, bent forward with her plump, scoured hands on her knees.

"Clay," Hilda said. "She doesn't want you to come with us now."

"Why not?"

"She thinks it's wiser. It doesn't make any difference. I'm going right to bed. It's been pretty awful."

"I'll come to see you."

"Please, you must. Every single day."

"I'll come tomorrow morning."

"Here's the address — Madame Malet, on the Rue Juan Juarès. It's an apartment building, Madame Jouvert said, the only one on the block."

"Allons, allons-y," Madame Jouvert whispered.

"Yes, all right. Tomorrow, then, Clay."

"Yes, tomorrow."

Clay helped her in beside Madame Jouvert and shut the door. The taxicab drove away.

IV

THE blue of the Mediterranean flowed to the horizon through gaps in shelves of red clay and purple cliff between which the tortuous road wound along the Côte des Maures. To the left of the road, and parallel to it, was a narrow gauge railroad track on which, keeping pace with Clay as he drove eastward, was a train of fifty years ago which crawled at a snail's pace along the coast four times a day from Toulon to Saint Raphael. Clay watched it move in and out among the ledges of rock. The high yellow cab and black smokestack, the squat wood-burning boiler of the engine, and the faded red and yellow open summer carriages which swayed behind the tender like soldiers out of step, repeated the colors of the olive green scrub oak that climbed the ridge away from the water, the rust-red and golden rocks and the clear green of the shoal water near shore that was the diaphanous green of seaweed spread thin and dried by the *Midi* sun.

Clay had followed the train nearly all the way from Toulon ; occasionally he had stopped for it at grade crossings and had waved to the engineer in the blue shadow of the high cab. Clay

had decided suddenly to leave Toulon. He had returned to the hotel from the Place de la Liberté, had taken an apéritif in the restaurant. At the next table a troupe of acrobats from the theatre were having tea, laughing, and talking in Italian, and Clay had felt lonely. And remembering Hilda's eyes, remembering the squat figure of the midwife, her paste-white face, he had been troubled. The car was in the street outside. It took only a few mintues to pack his bag and sketch-box, pay his bill, and drive away on the road to the east. Outside Hyères he had come upon the train and had followed it along the rugged coast toward La Pramousel.

The road had turned a sharp bend and now ran high along the side of the ridge. Far below there was a brief glimpse of gravel beach, a white villa. The whistle of the train pierced the stillness ; it was behind Clay now, but as the road came out again into the open from a grove of cork-oak trees he saw a crossing ahead and slowed the car. He stopped to wait for the train to pass. In a haze of acrid smoke it came through a clay cut and swung along a straight stretch of rust-rimmed track that ran to a point in the side of a hill a mile away, at the faint aquamarine disc of a tunnel. The last car was filled with Sene-galese soldiers. Red tasselled fezzes and faces in one tone of deep black crowded the windows. Their teeth grinned white against black skins and the pink stains of their mouths. A path of wind followed the train, stirring the yellowed tips of the grass-blades between the rails, then it was still again, and hot.

Clay put the car in gear and drove across the tracks. The road turned down the hill, winding among oak trees scarred where the cork had been stripped away. Ahead of Clay a small pink stucco station came to view ; the train now was leaving it with hissing steam and the *chef de gare* was carrying a slim bag of mail along the cinder *trottoir*. On the side of the station was a sign, *La Pramousel*, but there was no formal town to be seen. Among the trees were villas, widely spaced, and beyond, through the trunks of cork-oak trees that leaned in gnarled shapes to join branches in top-heavy foliage like bow-legged old men Clay saw the curve of the bay, the mirrored light of the sun on the

water, the green arm of a cape, and a few miles off shore the low blue shape of an island. Clay drove past the station. The road again crossed the tracks and off to the left, at a turn in the road, stood a faded pink hotel, square as a blockhouse. Above the door a frieze had been painted long ago, distinguishable now only in faint color forms, but in recent black paint was lettered : *Hôtel de la Gare — Ugobon*. Clay stopped the car in front of the hotel and got out, looking around him. In the valley, among the trees, or perched crab-wise on the side of the red and green ridge behind La Pramousel were the pink and ochre villas that were part of the landscape with the dank green foliage, the rust-red clay and the blue sea, typifying the air of deserton, of a summer resort gone to decay, that characterized the Côte des Maures. The houses, the rough road, the scraggly line of the coast, seemed to belong to the day of the miniature train that four times a day left a pungent veil of smoke along its grass-grown tracks.

In front of the door of the hotel strips of varicolored reed strung vertically together formed a curtain and trailed fringed tassels of soiled string lace on the stone doorsill. Clay pushed through it and stood in a silent, empty *bistrot* as the clatter of the reeds died away behind him. Opposite him was a zinc-topped bar that sagged in the middle, behind it shelves of bottles with labels bright against the gray wall of the room. Clay went to the bar, calling, "Patron." Again there was silence ; only the somnolent buzz of flies and the faint creaking of the reeds at the door. Behind the bar a fawcet dripped water in regular drops on a sheet of zinc, like the trickle of a mountain spring. Clay called again, and heard a door slam in the rear of the house, then the hurried shuffle of felt slippers. A soft stout woman came to the doorway and paused with one hand on the doorjamb. Her eyes were bright as bits of blue cloth pasted on glass in her yellow-white face and hair the color of yellow wood-ash was wound around her small head.

"Bon jour, Madame."

"Bon jour, Monsieur."

"Vous êtes Madame Ugobon ?"

"Oui." She nodded and came forward, behind the bar.

"Dîtes-moi, où se trouve Monsieur Baron?"

"I speak English," the fat woman said, her voice nasal. "Monsieur Baron lives in a villa down the road, but they're not at home today. They've gone to Toulon."

"I just came from Toulon," Clay said. "Well, perhaps I'd better have a drink."

Madame Ugobon went behind the bar, resting her plump white arms, like dough rolled for baking, on the zinc.

"A glass of white wine," Clay said. He took off his beret and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. "It's hot, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is."

"Where did you learn English so well?"

"Oh, I lived in London for ten years." She smiled. "Monsieur Ugobon, my husband, was chef in a big hotel." She glanced at Clay. "You're not English. You're American."

"That's right." Clay picked up the glass of wine.

"We have an American staying here now — Monsieur Hart."

"Guy Hart?" Clay cried. "Why, he's a friend of mine. I've been looking for him all along the coast. Where is he, Madame?"

"He's playing boules with Monsieur Ugobon — out in back."

Clay put his glass on the bar.

"You can go out through the kitchen," Madame Ugobon said.

Behind the hotel there was a space of level ground, a faded pink color like the stucco of the building, and fringed with cork-oak trees. Clay found Guy Hart standing with one hand on his hip watching a small man with heavy black moustaches, wearing a shapeless cloth hat and frowning as he weighed a metal *boule* in one hand before making his play. Guy wore shorts and a sailor's *maillot* blue and white striped. His thick legs were bare and white and he wore *espadrilles*.

"Hey, Guy."

"Clay! Where did you come from?" When Guy smiled his lips turned like the curve of a whip around his flat nose,

his wide cheeks spread from his mouth like ripples in a pond.

"I thought you were in Cagnes," Clay said. "How long have you been here?"

"About a week. . . Monsieur Ugobon, I concede this game. I default.—Monsieur, c'est mon camarade, Monsieur Hall."

The Frenchman nodded, his moody black eyes turning to Clay beneath thick black brows. From the kitchen doorway Madame Ugobon called, plaintively : "Il est six heures, Pierre."

"N'importe."

Guy smiled at Clay. "Every day she has to remind him when to start dinner and he gets temperamental about it. But he's a good cook. Let's go have a drink." They went through the kitchen to the *bistrot* and sat down at one of the tables. Guy called to Madame Ugobon in a loud, imperious voice, banging his fist on the table, and when she came to the door he turned his friendly smile to her, his teeth white in his florid face.

"A glass of rum, Madame," he said. "What will you have, Clay?"

"White wine. I'm off liquor. I'm going to get to work."

"Are you suffering from that unhappy compulsion too? Well, so am I. But you try that wine and you'll change your mind. It was made just after breakfast."

Madame Ugobon put two glasses on the table, with a bottle of white wine and a dark bottle of Martinique rum with a gaudy label, a brown native against a chrome yellow background.

"Perhaps Monsieur Ugobon will start cooking now," she said. "I don't think he feels so very good today. It was so hot. He walked to the station at noon without his hat too, after I told him not to. And then Monsieur Lepesche was here this afternoon and beat him at boules. But I think I hear him breaking kindling now, to start a fire. He does it quietly, you see, so I won't know." She smiled.

"He can cook when he's in the mood," Guy said. "Madame Ugobon, this is my friend, Mr. Hall. He's going to stay here for a while — aren't you, Clay?"

"Yes, if there's room."

"There's a room next to Mr. Hart," Madame Ugobon said.
"Did you come from Toulon, Mr. Hall?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur Lepesche said the fleet was there. Did you see it?"

"Only from the quay."

"I've been wanting to go to Toulon for a long time. I'd like to go when the fleet's in. I saw the fleet once at Marseilles." Smiling, Madame Ugobon went behind the bar and sat down on a low stool. The sun was setting in purple clouds toward Toulon and light came faintly into the *bistrot* through reeds at the door. She stared at the sunset, its reflection an unhealthy rose color on her amber skin.

Clay felt at peace, relaxed in his chair as he sipped the tart white wine. He had known Guy Hart so long that conversation was almost unnecessary between them, and now he wanted to sit quietly, to look at the sunset and hear the *cigales* in the grass, to breathe the pungent woody air of the coast. He sat with the cool glass in his hand looking out through the curtain of reeds at the pale sky from which color was slowly fading.

"Don't you like that swell cockney accent of the Madame's?" Guy said. "He used to be a chef in a London hotel and they were in the chips."

"So she said."

"This part of the coast has been hard hit. I want you to see La Quirol. I walk over there every morning so I can see its decay. I like decadence. You walk through the tunnel to get there and you come out into a whore's dream of elegance. It was laid out about fifteen years ago and they planned it to be the resort of this part of the coast. They landscaped it, planted trees and gardens, built a hotel and villas, and now no one lives there. It never quite got started, and then along came the depression. I wrote a poem about it. That is, I'm going to."

"Most of the villas along here seem to be vacant," Clay said.

"Oh sure, you can rent them for next to nothing. Roger and Alice have one along the tracks a few hundred yards from here. They pay four hundred francs a month for it, a lot cheaper than

a room here in the hotel, and the Ugobons hardly make enough to get along. They're dipping into their savings to keep going."

"I think I'll stay down here a long time," Clay said.

"Madame, another rum in the *salle à manger*," Guy said. "Come on, Clay, if we sit in there long enough Monsieur Ugobon will break down and give us some food."

There were three tables near together in the salon. On the walls of the room years before a primitive hand, perhaps the same which had traced the faded frieze on the outside wall, had painted a landscape — the blue Mediterranean and the cliffs and red clay and the ilex trees of the coast-line. Along the wall, along the painted coast, ran railroad tracks, and the ancient train in its gaudy paint was shown, smoke issuing in clouds from the stack.

"Did you come here on that train, Guy?"

"Yes." Guy laughed, turning his eyes toward Clay, the convex lids rolling up like an owl's.

"How did you happen to leave Cagnes?"

"I never went to Cagnes." He paused while Madame Ugobon poured more rum from the bright-labelled bottle. "I was at Avignon first, Clay, and they didn't like me very much, so I went to Marseilles and I had a very touching experience, a very happy experience, Clay, but it cost me too much. Clay, do you have much faith in people? Do you believe in man's humanity to man? Never mind, let me tell you. I was in Marseilles, see, and there was a sailor. Do you see this maillot? It's the regulation French navy maillot, and he bought it for me — out of his own money, Clay. That was before he took mine."

"Enfin, Messieurs," Madame Ugobon stood in the doorway, a tray in her hand. "Supper is ready. Do you like soup, Mr. Hall?"

"Yes."

"Do you like bouillabaisse?"

"Bouillabaisse!" Guy cried.

"It's a surprise. We don't often have the fish to make bouillabaisse. It needs special fish, you know, and they're dear, but

Monsieur Lepesche brought them today." She put the plates on the table and stood by, smiling, while they ate.

"I was in Marseilles for four days, Clay," Guy said in a lower voice, pausing briefly to eat. "And it was wonderful, wonderful. When I get older I'm going to weep into my ginger beer as I tell this story. My grandchildren are going to come to me and say . . ."

"Your grandchildren, Guy?"

"My grand-nephews, then. They're going to come to me and say grand-uncle, tell us that nifty about Marseilles, about how the sailor done you wrong."

"Go ahead."

"Well, that's all. He stole my money, Clay. He slipped out in the middle of the night with my money, *but* — now listen," Guy turned to Clay, his spoon, streaked with the orange stain of the bouillabaisse, upraised. "Clay, do you know what he did? He took my money, but he left my wallet and he left me fifty francs and my *carte d'identité*."

"That was generous," Clay laughed.

"It was magnanimous, Clay. It was great of him. I felt it then and I feel it more now. But anyhow, there I was with my guts turned upside down from drinking and an empty glass could stare me down. So I remembered that Roger was here in La P. and I could borrow some money until I sent for more, so I hopped on the train." He looked at the painting on the wall. "I rode down with the engineer, Clay, sitting on blocks of wood in the tender, and I got tar all over my clothes. But when we stopped at Le Lavandou I went back and rode with some Sene-galese soldiers who had some white wine."

"There were soldiers on the train when it passed me today," Clay said. "What are they moving these troops around for?"

Guy shrugged. After the bouillabaisse there were noodles, then fresh sardines, grilled, turned in crisp circles with tails fast in open mouths. They drank white wine and after dinner they carried the bottle to the garden and sat at an iron table looking down through a lane in the trees at the path of moonlight on

the Mediterranean. Guy talked less, now that the sensitive flame of his comradeship had steadied and his mood of embracing Clay with friendly conversation had passed. Guy's life had always been one of quick departures, of sudden flights to new places, of constant search for new faces, feeling the need to complement himself, to complete the agonizing void in his own personality. Clay had known him since his first week in Paris and Clay was one of the few who had remained a constant in Guy's life. They sat in the garden until the wine was finished and when Clay went to bed Guy lingered still in the *bistrot* over a glass of rum.

The windows of Clay's room faced the sea ; above the black leaves of a cork-oak tree he could see the sheen of the water and after he had turned out the light he sat by the window looking at the moon and the stars, lost in the vastness of night over the Mediterranean. How often he had lain awake in the still brilliant nights of Texas looking at the stars, listening to the wailing of the coyotes over the plains. Now the universal background of the night turned his thoughts back to the deep, voiceless impressions of the past. Now he remembered the sleeping porch on the second floor of his grandfather's house in Rutherford, he remembered a startled awakening, petulant blinking at the sudden light against which the night insects dashed themselves with a snapping noise. He saw again his aunt's face. Her hair was brown then and her eyes were wide and blue ; there was the tight pinched look only in the lines beside her nose, in the weary droop of her chin. *Get up, Clay. What's the matter ? Get up and dress, dear.* Hiding his body across the bed from her, he had put on the clothes she passed to him, carefully buckling the straps of his trousers over his wide-ribbed stockings, dressing as if for the day. . . . But what is it, Auntie ? I haven't done anything. *Of course you haven't, dear. Your father wants to see you.* Together they had gone into the house, through Amon Hall's bedroom where the oaken furniture cast square black shadows, into the hall. And Amon was in the hall, walking up and down with long, loose-jointed strides, with creaking shoes, tall and dark and frightening in the dim hall. *What's*

be doing up, Olivia? Amon's bristling eyebrows cast shadow on his face. *I woke him, Papa.* *Mark wants to see him.* Clay remembered the grunt, the explosive grunt in which there was a negative kindness because of no expressed criticism. Then they were in the room with the awful sucking noise, the gasping irregular struggle of crippled lungs. There was a shaded light and he had stood there holding his aunt's hand, looking toward the sheeted bed, in recessed shadow. And that was all. He remembered the doctor's hand on his shoulder, the strong clean smell, and he remembered his grandfather again in the hall, murmuring, *Misfortune never comes singly*, not seeing Clay, saying, *I told him to mind his own oats.* *If he'd listened to me — Olivia, it was worry did it.* *He wore himself out — Olivia, put that boy to bed.* In the mornings then Clay had always run out to get the morning paper folded boomerang-shape where it had fallen on the lawn ; always he had run back, reading aloud the headlines meaningless to him, and Amon Hall had encouraged him to do it, laughing when he stumbled over words. He could not pronounce influenza ; it was always infenza, and there was no meaning in the black type *Thousands Die in Flu Epidemic.* And there was no meaning for him in death, even in the hushed days when the house was silent, when the horse-drawn hearse waited before the door, when he stood wide-eyed by the grave in the spongy clay soil while Olivia wept, her stiff satin dress rustling in the breeze from the plains. *Oh, Absalom, Absalom,* Amon Hall had said, with a slight break in his voice, with an unreal sound to his voice, and on the slow drive back to the yellow-gabled house Clay could only think *Shadrach, Meshach and Absalom walked in the fiery furnace*, when he knew it wasn't right. And he tried to think of who had walked in the fiery furnace with Shadrach and Meshach, and he started to ask his aunt, but she was crying, and then he knew that he could not ask his father, and then he knew what death was. How timelessly night can veil a life of days, can give vivid color to the mind-pictures that come in the dim interval before sleeping, for Clay might then again have been on the sleeping porch in Rutherford, on the screened-in porch be-

neath the glowing stars of sub-tropical night. He closed his eyes on moonlight as gently as a child.

The next morning Clay was awakened by the sun rising above the tip of the cape which curved into the sea, a protecting arm around the beach of La Pramousel. A second after he had opened his eyes he heard a distant detonation, a rumbling sound over the still water. Sitting upright in bed he could see the blue sea and the green cape and a mile off shore, standing in between the mainland and the island, the long steel shape of a French gunboat. As he watched he saw a distant colorless flash, heard again the deep sound of a shot. Then there was a knock on the door.

“Entrez.”

“Eh, bien.” The door opened and a short plump girl with cheeks as pink as a Renoir peasant, with tiny eyes deep in flesh, with smiling lips and wide teeth, came into the room. “Eh, bien, mon petit oiseau, levez-vous, levez-vous. Il est sept heures.”

She went to the window and shut it, striding flat-footedly in her felt slippers. “Il est sept heures, Monsieur, et Monsieur ‘Art est en train de prendre son petit déjeuner.”

“Je me lève, alors,” Clay said sleepily.

The girl smiled at him over one strong round shoulder as she shut the door, and Clay began to dress, standing by the window where he could see the gunboat and the sea. The morning air seemed to penetrate every pore of his body, giving elasticity to his muscles. He went eagerly down the narrow stairs to the *bistrot*, and found Guy Hart seated at a table with *café au lait* in a tall thick glass beside him. Madame Ugobon called “Good morning,” in her cheery cockney accent, and brought him croissants and coffee.

“This is a wonderful place, Guy,” Clay said. “I feel like working now. I’m going to get out my paints this morning.”

“There’s a hill town near here you might like to paint.”

“Where is it?”

“Toward Toulon, about ten kilometers.”

Madame Ugobon went to the door, pushing aside the clattering curtains. “The train ought to be here.”

"People along the coast tell time by the train," Guy said.
"It's due here at seven-twenty."

In the distance they heard the whistle, rebounding from the mountain ridge.

"I think I'll start out right after breakfast," Clay said. "Then I've got to go on to Toulon. I won't be back until evening."

"Why Toulon?"

"Something I'd almost forgotten about."

Now they saw the engine of the train starting down the incline toward the station, swaying from side to side on the tracks.

"Roger and Alice are due on this train," Guy said. "Shall we walk over to the station, Clay?"

"I haven't finished my coffee."

Guy got up and went out into the sunlight. His legs were white against his khaki shorts, soft as a woman's. He wore the navy *maillot* and a brown felt hat with the brim turned down all around, shading his face and neck. He walked along beside the tracks to the *trottoir* and a moment later Clay saw Alice and the Frenchman get off one of the open summer carriages. As they came toward the hotel he went to meet them.

"Hello, Clay. Glad to see you. — We've been up all night. We went all through the quartier réservé. It's doing a rushing business with the fleet." When Alice talked her widow's peak moved up and down like a bobbin.

"What were *you* doing in the quartier réservé, Alice?"

"Roger wanted to talk to the sailors. He wants to get their viewpoint."

"Eet ees very interesting, Clye," Roger Baron said, putting out his large limp hand. His thick lips moved slowly when he talked ; his whole body slouched as if all his energy were needed for the mechanics of speaking. "You should be weeth us. We seet all night in leetle bistrots and talk to the matelots."

"How did you find your way to La Pramousel, Clay?" Alice asked, breaking in on Roger with a wave of her hand.

"I was in Toulon and I remembered your telling me about it."

"Going to stay here awhile?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've got to get to bed," Alice said. "Clay, I'll see you on the beach this afternoon. I'm going to sleep all day."

"How were the sailors, Alice?" Guy asked.

"You would have loved them, dear. There was one with yellow hair, a real revolutionary. — Oh, but I've got to get to bed."

Roger shook hands with Clay again, with a gentle pressure of his soft palm, and they walked along the road through the grove of ilex trees. Clay and Guy went back to the hotel. Clay's car stood under an oak tree near the door and he stopped beside it. His sketch-box and canvas were still in the tonneau.

"She's an energetic girl, sitting up all night in brothels, Guy. Why did they do it?"

"Roger's writing a proletarian poem. Didn't you know that?"

"Proletarian? Not surréaliste?"

"I suppose it will be a little of each. Left wing surréalisme. But he takes it very seriously." Guy laughed, then kicked at a pebble on the path. "Hell, Clay, we're all looking for an aesthetic, desperately, and Roger has tried everything else — Dadaism, surréalisme — now he's borrowed a little of Alice's fire to kindle his social conscience. I wish it were as simple as that."

Clay drove away. The road ran at sea level for several miles, and Clay turned off on a rocky road at a signpost marked *Bormes, 2.* The road wound steeply upwards, rough and narrow, and the engine raced as the car swerved in the deep hard ruts. The town square was level and quiet, high above the Mediterranean. There were pigeons on the dusty streets, rising in flight at the last instant as Clay drove up, flying in a swift low boomerang arc back again to the square. He left the car in front of the *hôtel de ville* and climbed a narrow street away from the square until he reached an open space from which he could look down on the town and the sea far below. He set up his easel and canvas and began to paint.

As the morning passed a haze of heat-waves spread over the red tile roofs, the air acquired a misty character, and the glaring

sun made the outlines of the buildings wavy to his eyes. He painted a section of the town square, with the cube of a white building in the foreground complemented by the town square and the descending planes of the landscape toward the sea. Painting now for the first time in many days his concentration was complete, his analysis was sharpened, and when he paused to light a cigarette he looked at the picture with dissatisfied appraisal. In the days of inaction his thoughts had crystallized, and looking at the square below him and its reproduction on the canvas he saw that except for the freedom of his color the painting was exact, photographic, and he knew that he was not satisfied with such expression. Always when he began to paint there was a burning eagerness, a strong desire to follow impulse, to allow his creative urge to flow upon the canvas full and free from his ego, to realize a complete expression of himself on the canvas. But gradually, as he blocked in his forms, as he arranged his composition, as he translated the images he saw to the canvas, his work became tighter, disciplined by the objects he saw, held by them in a traditional mould. The value of the artist, Clay thought, was to create from himself, not to reproduce line for line, color for color, the familiar images of nature's external world. He remembered the story of how cubist painting had come about, from the theory that the dominant forms of the buildings in a hill town such as this might be projected, towered into the sky, mirrored back again. Now, looking at the town below him, he saw that the interest it held for him as a picture was in the contrast of planes, the subtle juxtaposition of complementary colors. These should be emphasized ; from the basic forms of the scene before him he should create his design, express his impressions. Clay dropped his cigarette to the ground and stepped upon it ; suddenly he jerked the painting from the easel and put up a new canvas. He began to work again, developing the terraced planes of his picture, matching in his mind the colors he would use ; olive ground against the distant pale blue-green of shoal water, orange tiles against the trees and sky.

The sun had passed its zenith and descended well toward

Toulon when Clay finished. He had not had lunch and now, fumbling for a cigarette as he stepped back to look at the painting, he felt exhausted. And looking at the picture he was uncertain. He went forward to change the tone of a color, stepped back to look at it with his brush in his hand. The sun fell warmly on his face ; there would be light enough for hours' more work, and now suddenly he felt resentful that he must leave. The obligation to go to Toulon gave him an uneasy distress, and he thought of Hilda then without sympathy, resentful of the demands she made upon him. He turned his back on the painting and put his brushes away, closing the sketch-box. He folded the easel and picked up the canvas. He carried it down the hill to the automobile and put it in the tonneau without looking at it again. Then he drove silently toward Toulon, frowning as he watched the road.

V

THE widow Malet lived in a four-storied house that was yellow and blue-shadowed as if saturated with the pigment of the *Midi* sun and the blue of the hatchet-shaped harbor beyond. There was an *ascenseur*, a tiny gilded cage that swayed and groaned as it climbed a greased pole to the top floor, where it came to a halt with a sighing sound like a clock running down. Clay pressed the button that sent the elevator sliding down again and rang the bell at Madame Malet's door.

A small woman with a long nose and eyes like bright beads opened the door. She was dressed in black satin and wore a heart-shaped golden pendant suspended from a fine gold chain around her neck, the inevitable *souvenir* that bore within the picture of her husband in the uniform of the French army. She did not open the door wide until Clay asked for Hilda James, then she said, "Ah, c'est Monsieur. Enfin." She opened the door and locked and chained it after Clay had entered the foyer.

"One was beginning to wonder if you would come, Monsieur," she said. "This morning, when there was no ring on the door except that of Madame, my sister, well — it looked like rain, Monsieur, I can tell you."

She laughed and opened a door to a room filled with sunlight and the glint of water far away. She looked at him with her head on one side, seeming, with her bright eyes, long nose and slender leaning torso, like a crow which hops close to the ground. She shut the door behind him and put one finger to her mouth.

"Wait," she said. "Make no noise, Monsieur. She heard the bell ring, you understand, and she will wonder who it is. Perhaps she thinks it will be Madame Jouvert; perhaps she knows it is you. This time she will not be disappointed. See, this is her door. Pass through it gently and we will give her a surprise."

Madame Malet's eyes crinkled and her thin pale lips drew back from large teeth. Clay felt uncomfortable, and frowning, said: "I think you'd better knock first and tell her I'm here."

"But why, Monsieur? She expects you all day, why wait any longer? You understand nothing, you English."

"I'm American."

"But you're from the north just the same." Madame Malet's trilling laughter filled the room. "This morning, you understand, it was very black in here. It was bright outdoors. Yes, there was sunshine on the water, the fleet was in the harbor with its flags — you can see the boats from here — but in Madame's room? Ah, it was sombre, I can tell you that. No one came. No one telephoned. She had no letters and she had nothing to read. I found her a book of poems, but it only made her sad and Madame Jouvert says she should not be sad now."

"Which is her door then?" Clay said ungraciously.

"To your right, Monsieur."

He went across the room, paused, then knocked on the door. He heard Hilda's voice, "Entrez," and opened the door to find her facing him, sitting up in bed with her back against a bolster and a blue satin cushion. Her blonde hair spread over the blue satin with a sheen in the sunlight as glossy as the satin.

"Hello, Clay." She smiled.

"Hello," he said, and seeing her smile he understood that he had been expecting a petulant feminine rebuke and had hard-

ened himself against it. He walked over to her, standing beside the bed, and explained in a diffident tone : "I would have come this morning, but I thought you'd rather not see anyone."

"I'm all right." She raised her gray eyes. "I've come to depend on you, Clay, more than I should."

He drew a chair forward and she turned her face toward him, her cheek against the satin. Her face was oval, with wide cheekbones, a strong chin. Clay sat down, looking away from her. Driving in from Bormes, his nerves on edge, he had thought of ways to avoid coming to Toulon, even of sending a telegram that he was going away, that it was necessary for him to return to Paris. He had gone to devious lengths in his thoughts to plan an escape, to enclose himself like a nut in a husk of callousness and indifference.

"Now I'm only bored," Hilda was saying. "Madame Malet tries to keep me amused, gives me books to read. The widow's taste in literature is somewhat ardent." She picked up a yellow-backed book from the bed, showing Clay the title : *Les Chansons de Bilitis*. "There's a line in it that impressed me, Clay : 'Comment donc aimerons-nous l'homme, qui est grossier avec nous.' Isn't it true ? Men are bastards."

"Come now, you're not going to be bitter, are you, Hilda ?" he said, in a light evasion of her mood.

"No, I'm not bitter." She sighed. "No, Clay, from now on I'm going to be insensible. I'll never be a damned fool again. — What have you been doing ? What is life like in the outside world ?"

"I've been painting ; I worked in a hill town along the coast today. I've decided to stay around here a couple of months and work."

"It must be a fine feeling to be able to think ahead. I can't see beyond this week, Clay. I can't think beyond the next few days." She was watching him, sensing his restraint and troubled by it, feeling that the protection which had sheltered her was now somehow withdrawn. She turned her head, looking at the ceiling, saying : "I just lie here and watch the fleet and the tenders coming from the battleships and wait for the sound

of the doorbell when Madame Jouvert comes. I can't think ahead and I can't think back either. I feel like the girl who was turned into a tree by the bad fairy — you know the story. It seems years since I went to school and was a mannequin and had cocktails in the Ritz bar."

"I didn't know you were a mannequin."

"Oh, yes."

"Well, you certainly have the figure for it." Clay looked at her, the first time he had raised his eyes since he sat down beside the bed.

"I have to make money," Hilda said. "My father used to send me enough to live on, but he can't any more, so I got a job as a mannequin." She stretched her arms behind her head, her white wrists curved against the dark headboard. Her breasts were stretched to flat circles, outlined beneath the stuff of her nightgown, the white sustaining muscles straining to her armpits in firm curves complementary to the under arcs of her breasts. In the tidy bed, with her blonde hair spread on the satin against the stark headboard in its floral-wreath carving, and full in sunlight from the window, she looked like a painting by Fragonard, delicate and ethereal.

"I've moved," Clay said abruptly. "After I left you yesterday I drove along the coast to a town some friends of mine had told me about. I ran onto Guy Hart there, the fellow I was expecting to find in Cagnes, and I'm going to live there."

"You're not staying in the hotel any more."

"No."

"Is it far away?"

"It's a long drive." He saw the expression of her eyes and added after an instant: "But I can come in to see you every day."

"You don't need to."

"It's really not very far."

"I don't want to interrupt your work, Clay. I've complicated your life enough already. You go ahead and paint. Forget about me."

"I'll see you through all this."

"Don't treat me like a duty, Clay, please." She turned

toward him. "I know I've been a nuisance. It's only two days since the fête of La Bravade, since I met you in Saint Tropez, and I've taken all of your time. I've made demands on you as if I'd known you all my life. I was so helpless all alone. I want you to know that I'll be eternally grateful." She lay relaxed, her cheek against the pillow, looking at him.

"It's not a duty," Clay said. "I want to help you, Hilda." He leaned over and touched her hand. "Let's talk about something else. You haven't told me much about yourself, you know."

"There isn't much to tell. I go to school and model clothes and some day soon I'm going back to New Hampshire."

"New Hampshire? Is that where you're from?"

"Yes, Dorchester. My father runs a garage there, Clay. That's not a romantic background, is it?"

"How did you happen to come to Paris?"

"I came to study design."

"And then what? For instance, about all this — you've never told me anything, who he is or how it happened, or anything about it."

"I was thinking it was very considerate of you never to have asked me about that, Clay."

"I'm sorry. It's none of my business."

"Some day, when I want to talk about it . . ." She turned her head, looking at the white ceiling barred with rays of sunlight, remembering Paris in March, Paris in the rain. They had gone often to the theatre together, secretly, when he was free, and he had said one day *You know, my wife suspects that I have a mistress.* She remembered how she had stood with tight lips staring at her reflection in a shop window, not seeing the rows of shoes behind it, hearing only the word *mistress*. Until then it had been casual. Until then it had been a conscious, restrained adventure that she had wanted because she had been a year in Paris and she was twenty-four years old, a virgin at twenty-four. And he was dignified, a discreet older man, an advertising manager for an American firm who had lived for years in France, who acted a graceful part with stick and spats

and careful manner which had not then seemed pretentious to her. But now how long ago it seemed. Since then there had been her flight to the Riviera, the fête at Saint Tropez, and now Madame Jouvert.

"I was lonely, Clay, and I met someone who was nice to me," she said quietly. "Living alone in a hotel room, without many friends, you get to be another person, you get desperate. And it was Paris. Summer is the loneliest time of the year, Clay. In winter you can go where it's warm with a book and you want to be indoors and comfortable, but in summer in the sunlight anything in the world is possible to happen and you *can't* be shut off from it. He took me to the races in the Bois and we sat at cafés together. I liked him then, oh, very much. . . But it's all over now and I'm going to begin a new life after this, Clay. That's all you need to know, isn't it?"

"There's no reason for you to tell me anything. I shouldn't have asked you." Clay looked out the window at the harbor.

"I was pretty naïve about it. I suppose it's all part of my Paris education." She smiled. "What did you paint today?"

"Nothing any good." He looked at her, his eyes distant and thoughtful. "I'm trying to rationalize my work, to find my direction. I tried to work out a new approach today."

"Did you bring the picture with you?"

"It's in the car."

"Could I see it?"

"It's no good."

"Go and get it. Please. I'd like to see your work."

"All right, if you really want to see it." He stood up. "It's just an experiment."

As Clay opened the door Madame Malet met him with a smile. She was seated beside a goldfish bowl in the sunlight, facing the door.

"Monsieur goes so soon?"

"No. Only for a moment."

They heard the distant jangle of the bell-pull and Madame Malet jumped to her feet. "It's Madame, my sister."

Clay followed her to the foyer. Madame Jouvert entered with a little nod, her full lips pursed, and shook Clay's hand gingerly, giving him three fingers. She was dressed in black, with a black ribbon around her thick neck, sustaining a lavallière, and looked as if she had just come from church.

"Ah, Monsieur 'All, I want to talk to you." She looked at Clay from beady eyes. "Is that your auto in front of the house?"

"Yes."

"I must warn you, Monsieur, not to bring it here. I told you that yesterday. You ought to understand that we must be careful." She nodded and swept on toward Hilda's room.

Clay went out into the hall. The *ascenseur* was geared to carry passengers upwards only, so he walked down the four flights to the street and took the canvas from the car. When he returned Madame Malet was waiting by the door and let him in at once. He sat with her in the salon. She brought him an ashtray and watched the ash of his cigarette lengthen and turn to gray feathers; her eyes followed it until he tapped it gently into the ashtray. Clay sat silent, looking out at the harbor. Far in the distance he could see the breakwater, the docks, and the vessels of the fleet; occasionally a whistle sounded deep and tolling over the water. When Madame Jouvert returned to the salon her thick lips were compressed in her pasty face and she walked directly to Clay, sitting on the edge of a chair opposite him with her heavy arms in her lap.

"Now, Monsieur," she said in her abrupt, whispering tone, "Madame is upset. This is critical, you understand, and every little attention you show her will be of aid." Madame Jouvert smiled, her lips drawing back without humor from her yellow teeth. "What I wish to say is, be with Madame as you always have been. A little agitation, you know — excitement of the heart — to move the blood rapidly and stir one deeply — that aids nature in her work."

"Madame Eelda is *very* lonely," Madame Malet said. "Very sad indeed."

Clay looked from Madame Jouvert to her sister, then laughed.

"But I am serious, Monsieur," Madame Jouvert said, with a frown.

"I think Monsieur is indifferent," Madame Malet said, smiling. "What do you think? Listen, Monsieur, I will be sage-femme to you, and I prescribe a little wine, perhaps some champagne. That also warms the blood, excites the system, you know, and is even better than nature sometimes." She laughed. "A bottle of Pol Roger is sometimes more effective than a pretty leg in a silk stocking."

Madame Jouvert nodded approval, and Clay stood up, tucking the canvas under his arm. He left them nodding together and went into Hilda's room. He found her lying back against the satin pillow, her face pale, her lips bloodless in the clear light. She saw the canvas in his hand.

"Is that it, Clay? Stand it up at the foot of the bed."

Clay put the canvas on a chair, turned toward her, and she lay looking at it, her eyes half-closed.

"Clay, that's *very* good. It's so much better than I expected."

"Do you really like it?" Clay was pleased; now he felt sudden enthusiasm for the painting. He looked at it with his head on one side. "Do you see how I've built those planes, like a circular staircase?"

"Why have you been so modest, Clay? You're a fine painter."

He sat down on the edge of the bed, smiling at her. She was still looking at the painting, and now he saw that there were green shadows under her eyes, that her cheeks seemed hollow below her broad cheekbones.

"Hilda, you're very tired. Don't you want to rest?"

"I'm all right."

"I think I'd better go and leave you."

"Oh, no."

"I'll come tomorrow." He took her hand.

She raised her eyes. "Clay, why don't you leave your picture here? I'd like to have it on the wall."

"Of course."

"Can I keep it to remember you by?"

"Do you really want it? Hilda, no one ever asked me for a painting before. It's a very fine feeling." He looked into her tired gray eyes. He bent over, smoothing back her blonde hair with his palm, and gently kissed her cheek. Then at once he turned away, removed a colored print from the wall, and hung his painting of the hill town in its place.

VI

THE day came swiftly to La Pramousel and went away slowly in a haze of twilight toward Toulon. The sun burst above the squat ridge of Cap Nègre long after dawn and suddenly it was as warm as noonday. The dew dried from the grass, the sun fell full on the still water and the hard-baked earth, and the flies were warmed to life and swarmed into the *bistrot*. At noon the air was breathless; a breeze came each day at three o'clock, died in the leaves of the ilex trees, and again it became hot and still until the freshness of the sea and foliage bloomed again with the twilight and grew rich with night.

The next morning the sun was well above the cape and the heat was gathering like drops of water on a frosted silver bucket when Madame Ugobon gave them breakfast at a table in the *bistrot*. After she had placed before them the silver pot of coffee with its long wooden handle, the *petit pain* and the pitcher of boiled milk, she went behind the bar and rested her weight on the stool with her feet, tiny as the stumps of a Chinese matron, tucked on the bottom rung. They ate without talking, each thinking of the day's work, and Madame Ugobon devoted herself to a silent period of digestion, watching through the swaying curtain of colored reeds the silver sheet of the bay, that was always the sea to her and not waves or water, since she never went down to the beach. When they had finished and were smoking Guy said: "Clay, come over to La Quirol with me this morning. I walk over there every day, to exercise a little before I start work."

"It's pretty hot," Clay said, looking out at the sunlight. "How far is it?"

"Just over the hill."

"Mr. Hall is right," Madame Ugobon said, looking over at them. "It *is* a hot walk. I walked over to La Quirol once, a few years ago. I wanted to see the new hotel they were building, and I thought I'd almost never get there and back. Mr. Ugobon almost had to carry me. I declare, Mr. Hall, my feet were sore for a week after that."

"It's quite a journey," Guy said with a smile.

"But I'm going to Toulon tomorrow." Madame Ugobon smiled and her amber skin glowed pink from the line of her hair to the white circle of her neck. "I'm going there to spend the day, Mr. Hart. I'm going in on the morning train and coming home in the late afternoon."

"I have to go to Toulon tomorrow," Clay said.

"You're going to Toulon again?" Guy asked.

"Yes. Do you want to drive down with me, Madame?"

"Why, Mr. Hall, that's very nice. Why, yes I would, if that won't inconvenience you. I *do* want to see the fleet. I want to go out in one of those little boats, if I can find one that's safe, and see the ships from the water. . . But don't tell Monsieur Ugobon. He wouldn't want me to take any risks." The color deepened in her round face. "I'm not going to Toulon for pleasure, you see. I'm going there to be fitted—" her voice dropped to a whisper as she turned her flushed face away from them "—for *corsets*."

"Why, I didn't know you wore them, Madame Ugobon," Guy said. "You've got too good a figure to use corsets."

Madame Ugobon laughed and stood up. "The pair I've got on are just about worn out. It's like having none at all." Smiling, with her pink cheek touching the curve of her shoulder, she went into the kitchen.

Clay walked with Guy to La Quirol, up a hill, along the railroad tracks and through a blue tunnel. Guy went ahead, with a long stride, arms swinging like pendulums, unrelated to his body. The tunnel opened out upon a bank of flowers, spelling

La Quirol; far below them was the sea and a hotel with long verandas along the red-gold rocks.

"What a picture of bourgeois elegance," Guy said. "And it's a deserted village, Clay. No one lives here but the gardener and a few chance tourists who stay at the hotel."

"Why is that?"

"I suppose because people who have any money to spend want a sea resort like Nice or Cannes and if they want a quiet place they go somewhere like *La Pramousel*."

"They say France didn't begin to feel the depression until this year," Clay said. "It must be pretty tough in America, Guy. I've been tucked away over here since it began, but now it looks like it's catching up to me."

"You only notice it in places like this."

"But places like this are the only places we go. We don't know much about the workingman's life, Guy."

"That's a life with which I have nothing in common," Guy said, laughing.

"We see people like Madame Ugobon," Clay said. "But the only working class family I know is that of a man who robbed me in Paris last month. A model broke into my studio and bound and gagged me. . . Poor guy, he'll be hounded for the rest of his life because he stole my few hundred francs. He has a dossier now and whenever there's an unsolved theft they'll arrest him and question him. He'll never be secure from arrest again. He committed the gravest crime of all, Guy, a crime against property."

"Oh for God's sake, Clay. You talk like Roger Baron. Society has to protect itself against criminals."

"And besides, you like policemen," Clay said, smiling.

"Yes, I like policemen and sailors and busmen and ditchdiggers. . . I know a lot more about the working class than you do, in fact."

They went down to the rocks by the sea and sat watching the waves wash over a cluster of *oursins* on a ledge. They sat for an hour talking and smoking, Guy with his *espadrilles* beside him and his bare feet in the water. Guy's conversation was of

trivial things, of people and places he had been, gossipy and easy. He rarely talked about his work. Later they walked back along the tracks to La Pramousel. Now it was hot and Guy suggested that they go swimming.

From the hotel they descended a path by a sagging rail fence to the beach, a smooth strip of sand that extended from the base of the green Cap Nègre by the tideless bay to a cliff of rusty rocks that ran like stepping stones out into the sea. The sand was rose-tinted from particles of iron and scorched their feet as they went across it toward the water. Guy capered with his arms out-flung, and ran to cool his feet in the sea. Clay kicked off his *espadrilles* and followed at a run that took him waist-deep in the clear water. He dived and came up swimming.

Floating, with his back to gentle waves that slipped away like oil beneath his body, he watched Guy walk slowly into the sea, his thick arms raised at grotesque angles as the pebbles hurt his feet. He lowered himself gently into the water, submerging slowly, and his hair floated out from his head like tendrils of seaweed. He swam out to Clay, panting, and turned on his back, watching his big white toes bob with the swell.

"Have you noticed, Clay, there's no life here that belongs with the country. It's not wild and it's not civilized. It's just grubby. The people and the houses are stuck on like postage stamps."

"Life is less indigenous to the land than it used to be, Guy," Clay said lazily. "That's civilization."

"I don't like it."

To the left of the hotel there was a stone wall and behind it a villa, of which only the tile roof was visible in pink ridges above the green and black knobs of scrub pine. A low white picket gate in the wall opened on a path to the beach. Now Clay saw Roger and Alice coming through the gate, in beach robes. He and Guy swam toward shore and met them on the beach.

"Allo, Clye, allo, Guy." Roger looked at them from eyes half-screened by lazy, heavy lids and put out his hand in the inevitable Gallic formula of handshakes at each meeting and parting. His hand was a large peasant's hand, in keeping with

his gaunt soft body, and was coldly fleshy. He stood idly with his arms folded, his long toes gripping the sand. Alice sat down on a spread beach robe and looked up at Clay from her bright, chatoyant eyes, now blue with the blue of the sea.

"Clay, why do you keep running off to Toulon ?"

"I like Toulon."

"Are you going there again today ?"

"Maybe. Maybe tomorrow."

"Now, Al-ees," Roger said in his soft, purring voice, putting a broad hand on her shoulder. "You are too curious."

"I've wondered what the attraction of Toulon is," Guy said, sitting down. "Clay said he was out painting most of the day yesterday, but he didn't bring a picture home. How about it, Clay ?"

"Who's got a cigarette ?"

Roger handed Clay a package and as he struck a match he said : "Guy tells me you're writing a long poem, about Communism."

"About Communism ? Yes, a leetle."

"Now there's a case in point, Clay," Guy said lazily. "What does Roger know about the workingman ?"

"You don't have to be a workingman to have a heart," Alice said quickly. "Roger works with his brain, but he works. He finds out what he wants to know. He went to Toulon to talk to the sailors. He doesn't just lie on the beach and talk and drink and wonder whether the mistral's going to blow."

"Oh, I work my five or six hours a day," Guy said.

"Yes, you write your pointless poetry."

"Pointless !" Guy sat upright.

"Aimless then."

"What nonsense, Alice. Do you really think that every work of art should show a social conscience ?"

"For a writer, yes." She looked at him sharply. "What are you writing about now, Guy ?"

"I'm writing a book about America, about the midwest, where I was born, about a dismal awful country of Baptists and slow starvation, physical and moral."

"You can't live in France and write about America, Guy. You haven't the least idea what's going on. And Clay can't be an American painter, living over here. Why don't you go home, both of you?"

"We like it here. We like the freedom. Now, Alice—" Guy's voice rose thinly, "don't tell us we're expatriates."

"Why not? Aren't you? You've lived in France for about ten years, Guy. What do you know about America? You don't even read newspapers."

"I went back to America two years ago," Guy said. "I was there for months, and I didn't like it, either."

"No, you're still in rebellion, Guy. You're still rebelling against the machine age, or something like that. Don't you know that this is the generation of revolt, not rebellion?"

"Now Al-ees," Roger said softly.

"Oh, I know what I'm talking about," Alice said. "I know about a world you never heard of, Guy. I've worked in sweatshops — I've painted faces on little wooden dolls, one after another, hour after hour, day after day, and when I got to be very quick at it the boss cut the wages for piecework. I've nearly starved. — But that's something you don't know anything about, Guy, or you, Clay. You don't know that millions of people can barely get enough to eat and here you are writing about the machine age and cultural stagnation and chiefly concerned about the revolution of the English language — the revolution of the word instead of the revolution of the world."

"There'll be starving people to the end of time and it will only make political history," Guy said.

"Yes, yes," Alice said. "Why don't you do a piece about it for 'transition'?"

"I'm a little behind in this argument," Clay said. "The last time I saw you Roger was talking about a play he wrote about a lady who passed wind."

"Roger wrote that play two years ago," Alice said. "He was a surrealist then."

"No," Roger said. "Dada, Al-ees."

"Well, Dadaist then."

"Al-ees, let us swim. Allons-y."

"Oh all right." Alice stood up. "We'll take up where we left off some other time, Guy."

She and Roger went down to the water and Guy turned to Clay with a twisted smile.

"She's become rather aggressive," Clay said quietly, knowing she had wounded Guy in exposing his indecision, his uncertainty in his work.

"She's a hell cat," Guy said. "She's going hand in hand with Roger. They have the enthusiasm of the convert just now, Clay. You know, here in France they've always had what they've called the lunatic fringe, the anarchists and the Bolsheviks and so forth. Roger has progressed to it very naturally. From the nonsense of Dadaism through the unconsciousness of surrealisme and back to the nonsense of Communism again. Next year it will be something else, but Alice will adopt it and absorb it just as completely and just as aggressively."

"Now that you've explained it to your satisfaction," Clay said. "How about lunch?"

VII

THE bottle of rum on the washstand was uncorked and the glass beside it was wet and blue-brown from the liquor, drops of which, iridescent in the twilight, rolled down its sides and across the marble to the edge of the washstand, from which they dripped regularly to the floor. As Guy Hart poured water from a pitcher into the basin he looked at the bottle and the empty glass. His head ached and his mouth was dry from an afternoon of drinking ; he had slept a little and his skin felt tight and feverish. He splashed water on his face, dipped his head in it, then rubbed the towel vigorously over his whole head, releasing the circulation. He saw his reflection mistily in the glass as he combed his hair, and he frowned at it, again with the anguish of disgust that came so often, so recurrently, to torment him. It's caved in, he thought, I was good looking before my face caved in. He stared at the deep lines beside his mouth,

which were dimples when he smiled, at his wide shapeless face, high-colored against his dark hair, and he remembered himself, strong with youth, working in the fields in Kansas, shocking wheat, looking at the flowing muscles of the field hands, sitting with them in the shade of a straw-stack. He remembered himself in Greenwich Village fifteen years ago, before he came to France. His hair had been cut square at the neck then, before he let it grow. He wore a checked suit and a black shirt and he wrote poetry that was printed in the little magazines, that brought letters, meetings, new friends. And he remembered Paris years ago, when the *Dôme* was a *bistrot*. Had he changed so much since then? Could his face show the emptiness, the soul-deep loneliness that only liquor could set at rest? In Germany, impermanence had been life; at the Kleine Bayadere, in the Dorian Gray Diele he had told himself: now I'm beginning to live. In Berlin he had taken cocaine and there was no repression; there was no social pressure to combat; there was no instinct of the outcast, no arrogant sneers, no overt contempt, as there had been in America when he returned there two years before. He wanted peace, not to be attacked, not to be criticized, and most of all not to be known too well, not to see the tired look of constant association on the face of another, not to realize again that he had been drained like a tree of sap, that he was dry and sterile and must rush away again to new faces, new places, to renew again his ego through them. He turned away from the reflection of his weary face in the mirror, saw the empty glass, and quickly filled it half-full. He gulped the rum down and went unsteadily to the stairs, descending slowly to the salon where he knew Clay would be waiting; Clay with the full relaxation of one who has worked hard and well that day, still with eagerness and youth and unfailing interest, sufficient to himself.

Guy sat silent during dinner, erect and silent with his lips tightly drawn, with the guilty determination to conceal his drunkenness. He did not notice the mysterious air of secret excitement with which Sara, the red-cheeked maid, served them. Her hip against the table, breaking its full curve, or with her

hands on the back of Clay's chair, peering at them, laughing and always hovering near with impish grace, she waited eagerly for each course to be eaten. When they had finished the *conserve*, when the bottle of red wine was empty, and when the last dish had been cleared from the table, she paused by the door with her short legs spread and her arms akimbo on her hips, crying: "Surprise, surprise. Restez à table. Père Ugobon a une surprise."

Her little eyes went almost from sight in her dappled red cheeks and her snaggle teeth showed in a grin. With a ceremonious gesture of her short arms, with head bent, she pushed open the swinging door and leaned against it, Madame Ugobon entered with her head a little to one side against the swell of her shoulder, and Monsieur Ugobon followed her, carrying a tray with five glasses and a bottle of champagne in a bucket of spring water. His eyes danced, his black moustache swept up toward his ears, away from his smiling lips and prominent Italian gums, and he wore his gray cloth hat far on the back of his head.

"On va faire la bombe," he cried. "Voilà." He placed the tray on the table and smiled.

"Monsieur Ugobon wants to have a little celebration," Madame Ugobon said in a precise, flustered voice. "It's because I'm going to Toulon tomorrow."

Monsieur Ugobon smiled and nodded, although he did not understand her English. He watched her face closely when she spoke, with his head extended toward her, and when she had finished he went on about what he was doing like a toy monkey on a string. He danced across the room to a phonograph in the corner, a square black box with a long lavender horn of blunderbuss shape, streaked with red like veins of blood following ridges from the rose-flushed base of the horn to its flaring mouth. He selected a record and set it in place and then as he turned the long crank a shrill male voice began to sing *Auprès de ma Blonde* in words that stumbled over each other. Madame Ugobon sat down, looking at the phonograph with a fixed bright smile, and her husband opened the champagne, easing the cork from the bottle so that it came out with a soft, sucking sound. The cool

wine rushed out in foam and he quickly decanted it into their glasses. Sara put the tip of one forefinger on the rim of each glass as he filled it, to prevent the foam from spilling over. Guy caught up his glass, absently, and raised it to his lips.

"Wait a minute, Guy," Clay whispered, noticing Monsieur Ugobon's expressionless stare. "We're going to have a toast first."

"Oh, all right. Sorry." Guy returned his glass to the table and idly rubbed his fingernails against the texture of his *maillet*.

Monsieur Ugobon raised his hand. "On porte un toast à vous, Messieurs, à vous et à Madame."

"Salut," they said, "santé," and "à la vôtre," and Guy drained his glass.

"C'est bon," Guy said in his nasal western voice. "It's a little warm but it has plenty of fizz."

"I thought you'd like it, Mr. Hart," Madame Ugobon said, smiling. "We haven't had a party in a long time."

"I'm always in the mood for a party, Madame," Guy said. He went to the phonograph. "Here, let's play something hot." He stopped the record and the sound ran thinly away with the scratch of the needle.

"I'm afraid you won't find anything very gay, Mr. Hart," Madame Ugobon said slowly. "We haven't any American records."

"Well, this has got a little more snap in it," Guy said, holding up a disc worn smooth as a plate. "I like a good waltz."

"Valse?" Monsieur Ugobon said, nodding.

Guy started the machine and the melody of the Blue Danube came as from a great distance through the wide-mouthed horn. Guy returned to the table, his fat knees swaying with the music, and poured himself another glass of champagne. Madame Ugobon hummed the tune, and Sara stood against the wall with her hands behind her back, laughing and watching Monsieur Ugobon, who was rotating slowly in the middle of the room. Clay asked Madame Ugobon to dance. Blushing, she rose to meet him and as they whirled ponderously on the pivot of Madame Ugobon's momentum Guy stood by the table, drinking,

and Monsieur Ugobon searched for something in the cabinet of the phonograph. Suddenly he sprang back, adjusting a pair of wood-whittled castanets to his short fingers. He clicked them sharply, tapping his feet and shaking his head, the cloth cap bouncing to the back of his head. Sara laughed and followed him, clapping her hands. When the record finished playing Guy was drinking the last of his champagne, his eyes a sombre brown, heavy-lidded.

"Let's have another bottle, Madame," he said.

"Say, Guy, champagne is costly," Clay said.

"They can put it on my bill."

"Oh no, Mr. Hart," Madame Ugobon said in a high, protesting voice. "This is our party. Monsieur Ugobon has another bottle cold in the kitchen."

Monsieur Ugobon went to get the wine and Guy kneeled beside the phonograph, looking through the records. Finally he made a wry face and played the Blue Danube again. When Monsieur Ugobon returned with the bottle only Guy's glass was empty. Clay danced again with Madame Ugobon and Sara, her plump body moving with the music, asked : "Vous ne dansez pas, Monsieur 'Art ?"

"Me ? Sure." Guy picked up his glass. "Mais oui."

"N'aimez-vous pas la valse ?"

"Ah, j'aime la valse, j'aime la valse. Vous savez, à Vienne, au pays de la valse, j'étais champion. Vous savez, Sara, champion."

"Go ahead and dance with her, Guy," Clay said.

"I don't want to dance." Guy looked at Clay with his heavy lids lifting a little. "I want to drink."

Madame Ugobon returned to the table, breathing fast and flicking her neck with a handkerchief. "That's all the dancing for me tonight, Mr. Hall. Goodness, I haven't danced so much since I can remember, and I don't want to tire myself. I'll be the whole day in Toulon tomorrow, and there's the long ride there and back too."

"Anybody would think you were going to China instead of only forty kilometers down the road, Madame," Guy said with

a smile, the deep dimples running with the length of his jaw. "We're all bidding you farewell as if we never expected to see you again."

"It's quite a journey for me, Mr. Hart," Madame Ugobon said with her blue eyes round as marbles. "I'm not used to rambling around the world like you are."

"Yes, of course," Guy said absently, his eyes on the bottle of champagne, now nearly empty. He made a sudden awkward gesture of his arm from the elbow. "Bring me a bottle of rum, Madame, and put it on my bill. I don't want any more champagne."

"Well, whatever you like, Mr. Hart," Madame Ugobon said stiffly.

Monsieur Ugobon had selected another record, a shrill jerky piece with a cat-like male voice breaking flat at the end of the verse and beginning with an audible breath and a mad rush of words at the start of the next. Smiling, he clicked the home-made castaners.

"Unbend a little, Guy," Clay said. "This party isn't for your highness. It's for Madame Ugobon."

"Why, Christ, I'm the life of the party." Guy raised his heavy eyebrows. "I'm the gayest one here. Watch me, fellow." He sprang to his feet as Madame Ugobon came into the room with a glass of rum and a siphon. He squirted the charged water in haste and it splashed over in foam on the table. Guy took a deep drink and cried, his lips wet: "Now I'll show you some pep, Madame, some pep Américain." He laughed, his brown eyes glowing beneath his pasty lids. Singing meaningless words in a cracked voice that was a caricature of the singer in the record, he whirled upon the floor, his arms and legs in awkward motion as if unrelated to his heavy torso. He staggered, his lower lip out-thrust, his eyes half-closed and it seemed as he danced that but for his drunkenness there was a martyr's pain in his expression. His voice went on in a thin Chinese wail that caused Madame Ugobon to laugh and cover her ears with her palms, while her husband gave up his castanets with a

shrug of his shoulders. When the record stopped playing Guy halted abruptly in the center of the room, panting.

"Clay, that's art," he said, coming toward the table. His eyelids were white in his flushed face. "That, mon vieux, is real art. Did you ever see a Chinese opera?"

"Is that what you were singing?" Clay laughed.

Guy glanced at him, then sat down heavily. "Sometime when you're in New York, if you're ever in New York, go down to Chinatown and see one." He picked up his glass; color was receding from his face and now he was aware of Madame Ugobon's averted eyes, of her husband's silent castanets and of Sar crouched by the wall staring at him. Guy drained his rum and slammed the glass carelessly on the table. It shattered in his hand and splinters of glass sprayed to the floor. He frowned and wiped his hand on his *maillot*.

"C'est rien d'importance," he said thickly. ~~Partie on my~~ bill, Madame."

"Did you cut yourself, Mr. Hart?"

"No, I'm all right."

Madame Ugobon brushed the shattered glass from the table into her apron. "It doesn't make any difference, Mr. Hart. It wasn't a *good* glass."

Guy stood up, bending his head to examine a tiny red scratch on one finger. "I'm going to bed," he said suddenly in a strident, nervous tone. "Christ, I'm going to bed. Oh, Jesus Christ." He lurched toward the door and as he went up the stairs, falling against the banister, they heard him sobbing convulsively, under his breath.

"Well, I declare," Madame Ugobon said, and let the fragments of glass slip from her apron to the floor. She looked at Clay, her eyes round and blue. "Well, I think I'll go to bed myself. I don't want to be tired for my trip to ~~Tolton~~ tomorrow."

"It was a fine party, Madame," Clay said.

"Why, thank you, Mr. Hall. We thought you might like it, being way out here in the country, when you're used to Paris

and the cafés. The champagne was the best we had, though it isn't very good, I suppose. We don't drink much of it and people don't often order champagne here. — It would have been so much better if we'd had some ice."

VIII

THE wallpaper was a pale pink, barred with white and cross-barred by the glowing reflection of green shutters at the window. Sunlight came through lace curtains which moved gently in the breeze from the sea, blowing back occasionally in gentle gusts so that Hilda James could see the water far away, over the roofs of the houses. She could see the solid gray shape of the naval arsenal and the long arm of the breakwater and sometimes she saw the boats in the harbor with their pennants flying, but she was tired of looking at these things.

Opposite her as she lay in bed was Clay's painting of the hill town. Its cube forms and shifting planes dominated the room and Hilda's eyes returned to it again, away from the clock on the mantel which had ticked off two days since he hung the painting on the wall. The day before she had waited for him ; she had watched the sun rise to noon, to a painful eclipse when Madame Jouvert came to see her, and she lay with her eyes shut fast and her hands clenched until her nails marked the flesh of her palms. Then she had watched its dragging decline into the twilight, waiting, turning often toward the door, listening for the bell. And when she awoke that morning, feverish and with her forehead wet against the damp pillow, her first thought had been : would he never come again ? Was she now left alone to contain her fright within herself ?

The morning sun fell on the painting on the wall and she was looking at it, with the magazine she had been reading laid aside, when Clay rang the bell at the widow Malet's door. When he came into the bedroom she was sitting erect, watching for him.

"Clay, it's you at last." Her smile was shy and self-conscious.

"How is everything ?"

She nodded her head, still smiling.

"Madame Malet reprimanded me for not coming yesterday. I would have, Hilda, but instead I decided to come in early and spend the day today."

"Why should you come every day?" Hilda's tone was matter-of-fact. "Madame Malet is a sentimental fool. She comes in and twitters every day, asking me all sorts of questions. She can't understand why I don't take more interest in my *jeune homme*, or he in me." She laughed. "Clay, light me a cigarette. I've had none but Madame Malet's since I've been here. She won't send out for any for me, says they're too expensive and I should learn to like French tobacco."

Clay sat in a chair by the bed and they looked into each other's eyes for a moment, both smiling so long that some comment was needed and Hilda asked: "What are you smiling about?"

"I was remembering something."

"Yes?"

"Oh, last time I was here I had a long chat with the widow Malet. It seems she had an ulterior motive in giving you such passionate literature to read."

"A motive? What do you mean?"

"This will make you laugh. It seems she's treating you as a clinical subject. She wants to stimulate your blood and agitate your system — it's Madame Jouvert's idea, but the widow's prescription."

"What's it all about, Clay?"

"Why, she's playing Cupid — wants to bring us together, you see."

Her face turned pink and her mouth opened and shut again. Then she said: "That's typically and nastily French."

"Oh now, Hilda."

She laughed. "I'll bet it worried you, Clay."

He leaned forward, his hands clasped between his knees, and she turned her eyes away. He said quietly: "Don't you know, Hilda, that if I'd met you — normally — I would have pursued you all along the Côte des Maures? Now, for a few days, we have a sort of unreal intimacy, like two strange goldfish dropped

into Madame Malet's bowl. Before we get used to it, it will be over, and then — what are you going to do then?"

"I'm going back to Paris."

"I think I'll stay here and work, and I'll remember this, for a long time. — Hilda, why don't you spend a week or two here, on the beach, in the sunshine, before you go back?"

"I can't, Clay."

"Why not?"

"I have my job — I have to go back." She sighed, looking at his long fingers twisted together. He usually sat very still and only his hands moved ; they expressed his personality for her. "And I want to go back. I want to stay a little longer in Paris and hear some good music and go to the theatre, and then I'm going home. Clay, I've had my European education."

"I wish you could spare a week," Clay said. "But I suppose what you want is some place familiar to you, where you can put your feet on the ground again."

"That's it exactly."

"Some day I'm going back," Clay said. "I've been over here long enough. I've lost touch with America, and I can't get close enough to France to lead a complete life. And France has changed. It's not the same casual, easy place to live in. You can't have a carefree idyll among people who are worrying about where their bread and cheese is coming from." He looked at her blonde hair, spread on the pillow, at her strong round chin, thinking that there was peace, a sense of fulfillment, in being with her, but also a stirring nostalgia that caused him to talk aimlessly of the future, vaguely to make indefinite statements of his plans. He had not thought much of returning to America, but now, sitting with her in the pink-walled bedroom towered above the harbor, he felt that his life in France was purposeless and artificial.

"Yes," he said. "I belong in America. I've decided that. I've been an expatriate long enough."

"When do you think you'll go back, Clay?"

"I don't know. In the spring, perhaps."

There was a discreet rap on the door, then Madame Malet

opened it, coming with her sharp bright face into the room.

“Madame Jouvert vient d’arriver.”

“Now I feel like hiding under the bed,” Hilda said. “Clay, when will it be over with ?”

He went out. In the next room, standing by the goldfish bowl in the sunlight, was Madame Jouvert, again in black, with her oily hair built in a high black mass on her head. She beckoned to Clay with one fat finger and he went toward her. Madame Malet shut the door to Hilda’s room quietly.

“Monsieur ’All, this is very serious. I want to talk to you.”

“Yes, Madame.”

“You must not come here again.”

“But why not ? What’s the matter ? — I left my car in the Place de la Liberté today, Madame.”

“Yes, yes, but let me tell you. As I came here today, as I was entering the ascenseur, the concierge came to me with her eyes in their corners and her palm cupped like a money sack and she said to me, ‘who is the young Englishman who comes so often to your sister’s house ?’” Madame Jouvert’s thick white lids lifted from her dark eyes. “And she said, ‘she is also English, is she not, the young woman who visits your sister ?’”

“What harm is there in that,” Clay said. “Concierges are always curious.”

“Curious, yes, but this woman is suspicious, Monsieur. And the tenants of the building also begin to wonder. The young woman visits my sister but she does not leave the house, she does not leave her room. And there have been other visitors of my sister at other times, you understand. To be safe, Monsieur, you must not come again. You must understand that this is very serious, very serious indeed.”

Clay frowned. “What are you trying to tell me, Madame ? Do you mean that there is danger ?”

“Of course there is danger.”

“For Mademoiselle James, I mean. Is it possible that she might die ? Is that what you mean ?”

Madame Jouvert looked at him for a long, silent moment before she replied. Her oily eyebrows drew together. “I will

tell you this, Monsieur 'All," she said in a whispering voice. "I wish I had not taken this case. It has been a very long time. You understand that. Yes, there is danger. There is very grave danger. — And if anything happens, well, it is better if you had not been seen here. You understand, Monsieur, that this is serious for you, too, not only for my sister and for me. If the concierge should whisper a little word to the police it would be unhappy for us all. Of course you know that you are responsible in this matter?"

"Yes."

"You and I and my sister, the three of us. I tell you, you must stay away ; you must not attract attention. It will only be for two days — three days perhaps — and it will be over. We must hope for the best, and until then, Monsieur, we will forget your face here."

"But let me think, Madame. I don't want to leave Mademoiselle alone. . . ."

"I must insist, Monsieur. As for Mademoiselle Eelda, we will do all that is possible. Naturally. — If everything goes well, you understand, in these cases the mother is not culpable. That's the law. But even if all goes well you and I and Madame Malet could go to prison for many years. Now do you agree?"

"First I want to talk to Hilda."

"Later, after I have been with her. — But you must tell her nothing of this, you understand. — Wait here for me, please." Madame Jouvert moved ponderously toward the door to Hilda's room and Clay sat down by the goldfish bowl, looking out at the harbor.

Within five minutes Madame Jouvert opened the door and called to him. He found Hilda waiting for him, sitting upright, with her gray eyes tawny in the sunlight. "Clay, I didn't know."

"Didn't know what?"

"I didn't realize you were in the least responsible. I never thought of that. It's not right for me to complicate your life so much."

"Oh, she told you that, did she?" Clay looked at her closely

for an instant ; there was no expression of fear on her face. "But there's nothing to worry about." He sat down beside her and took her hand. "Madame Jouvert has to be careful, of course, and I think she exaggerates. She's frightened by a concierge's leer, and whoever heard of a concierge who didn't pretend to know your every secret. That's the way they get big tips."

"But why should you be responsible and not me ?"

"Because of the declining birth rate, I suppose. They need the mothers to produce potential soldiers for France. — Forget about it, Hilda."

"And you can't come any more, she said. — I'm going to miss you, Clay. — I'm going to be terribly melancholy. — I don't like depending on you this way."

Madame Jouvert stood at the foot of the bed, watching them, her owl-like eyes turning alternately from Clay to Hilda as they talked.

"I feel as if I'm deserting you, Hilda."

"I'll be all right. Don't worry about me, Clay. — I'm not worried." She looked away from him. "But damn, why did this have to happen !"

"Madame Jouvert says it will only be two more days."

"Yes. — I'll let you know how things go, if you like. — But Clay, where are you ?" Her eyes turned back to him. "I don't even know your address."

"It's the Hôtel de la Gare, La Pramousel. There's a telephone there. If anything . . ." He turned suddenly away from her, biting his lip. — "Madame Jouvert, on peut me téléphoner chez Madame Ugobon, Hôtel de la Gare, La Pramousel."

"Oui, Monsieur."

"I'll come to Toulon at once when you call, Hilda, and then why don't you come back to La Pramousel and stay a few days ? Lie on the beach awhile in the sun."

"Maybe."

"You must."

Now she smiled, and they did not talk again of the one thing

so morbidly present in their relationship. At noon Madame Malet served them luncheon, and they drank a bottle of *Entre Deux Mers* together. Clay tried to be gay, but Hilda watched the sun decline and remained for long periods silent, watching it, and looking sometimes at the clock on the mantel. When it came time for Clay to leave her fingers clutched his hand, and he felt a haunting sadness, wondering if he would see her again. He said : "I suppose it's goodbye for a while."

"Yes."

"But only two days. I'll be waiting by the telephone." Pressing her hand, he leaned over and kissed her, and when the door shut her from sight the memory remained sharply defined of the sunny room and her fine blonde hair and gray eyes. It was an afternoon he would not forget.

Clay met Madame Ugobon, stiff in her new corsets, on the Boulevard de Strasbourg, and she said at once : "I just didn't dare, Mr. Hall. I sat on the quay and I even got into one of the little boats, but it rocked so that I didn't dare go out to see the fleet."

On the drive along the coast Madame Ugobon talked steadily of the things she had seen in the stores, of the high prices, of the harbor and the fleet and the crowds on the quay. Clay was silent, his attention occupied by the winding road. He was tired and depressed, feeling again the dissatisfaction and distaste he had tried for months to escape, and he remembered that until he had gone to Toulon that morning, until he had seen Hilda and Madame Jouvert, he had been at rest, almost contented. There returned to him the pent, constricted feeling he had had before he left Arlette in Paris ; he wanted to be alone. Now he forgot the sympathy and tenderness he had felt that afternoon for Hilda, and instead he began to be sorry that he had ever become involved with her. Left to herself, he thought, she would have found a way ; now again there was something to concern him, to prohibit him the almost selfless freedom he sought.

At La Pramousel Madame Ugobon hurried at once to the kitchen to exhibit to her husband a warm soft figure constrained by the tight corsets, a flushed happy face and holiday smile.

Guy Hart was in the *bistrot*, drinking white wine now, and the first thing he said was : "Clay, was I pretty bad last night ?"

"Nobody minded," Clay said, and later, after dinner, they sat in the garden and Guy talked in a soft, nostalgic voice.

"I'm going to move on in a little bit, Clay. I've been down here long enough. Have you ever been to Spain ? I think I'll go to Barcelona. The barman at the *Clôserie des Lilas*, Diego, is from Barcelona. Yes, I think I'll go there, and then maybe drift on over to Portugal. . . ."

IX

Now she felt drawn within herself ; she felt herself a compact, steel-cold entity, existing without relation to other objects, to the rest of the world and the people in it. Now there was hardly any memory of pain, of the timeless periods of wide-eyed staring at the bars of light on the ceiling. Now instead of agony there was a sinking emptiness. She did not want to feel any more. She wanted to be numb and silent and go mechanically about the business of living, to reflect it from her without absorption, without impression. For a long time now she did not want to think.

She sat on the edge of the bed, dressed again, and the clothes felt alien to her body. It seemed that she had been months in bed and that she was too weak and tired to begin her life again, and she saw ahead long days of convalescence, of mental readjustment. Paris again, and the summer would be over. There would be no more leaves on the chestnut trees in the parks. There would be rain and damp, but she felt that after these days of searching sunlight she wanted rain. She wanted to avoid the clear light like a woman rouged for the night. In Paris would she want the same things, she wondered. Would she go to the Louvre and the galleries on the Rue de Seine ? Would she wish to hear music again ? Could she be interested in clothes and the theatre and the men she met ?

Hilda's bags were packed. They stood by the door, the leather shining in the light. Madame Malet had sent for a

taxis and within a few minutes she would be on the train for Marseilles, and at Marseilles she would change for an express to Paris. Tomorrow she would be far from the *Midi*, far from Madame Malet and the pink-walled room. Now very suddenly all she had thought about for weeks could hardly be remembered ; now it was unbelievable that she need not worry. Perhaps it was only that she was now a little hysterical ; it had been so recent. Later, again in Paris, she could be herself again, the quiet cautious girl who had come from New Hampshire for a year in France. In less than a month Madame Jouvert would be forgotten, and forgotten also the *fête de La Bravade*, the breathless days of waiting. Her eyes turned toward the door, to the painting leaning against the wall beside it, and rested on the geometric planes of the hill town. After a moment she stood up and walked a few paces toward the door. She was unsteady and her ankles rocked, unaccustomed to the high heels. She called to Madame Malet.

“Oui, Eelda. — Le taxi n'est pas encore venu.” Madame Malet approached her, smiling.

“Ce n'est pas ça,” Hilda said. “Madame, pouvez-vous me prêter du papier, et puis une plume ?”

“Ah. Enfin ! Mademoiselle pense à son jeune homme. Elle va écrire un petit mot, non ?”

“Oui.”

“Mais si vous voulez téléphoner, Eelda. . .”

“No,” Hilda said, in English. “Not the telephone. No, I don't want to talk to him.”

“Comment?” Madame Malet's black eyebrows raised above her pointed nose.

“Pas le téléphone,” Hilda said. “I'll write to him. Je vais écrire, Madame.”

“Eh bien,” Madame Malet sighed. “Attendez, Eelda.” She went away and Hilda crossed to a chair by the table, the goldfish bowl at her elbow, before her a view of the harbor through lace curtains. Only once before had she been out of the bedroom, but it was as familiar as habit to sit there by the window, so much had she become part of the routine of the

household. She waited silently until Madame Malet brought her pen and ink, a pad of stationery. She moved the goldfish bowl on its crocheted doily farther away from her and bent over the white paper, writing in small, exact letters : *Dear Clay : Well, it's all over, with no trouble at all.* She raised her eyes, thinking again of the interminable agony, her fingers clenching on the slender stem of the pen. *It happened day before yesterday and I had a terrific temperature, forty-four. I don't know what that is, but Madame Jouvert told me later that it frightened her. The fever started in the night and kept up all the next day, but now I'm all right again, entirely and perfectly well. I'm going away now, and by the time you get this letter I'll be practically in Paris. My bags are packed and I'm waiting for a taxi, and I'm taking your painting of the hill town with me. Do you mind if I keep it to remember you by? You know when you left me the other day I was very close to tears. I couldn't think of anything to say, to thank you, to tell you how much I appreciate all you've done. Now it seems so long ago, doesn't it?* She bit the end of the pen, looking out the window at the far horizon of the sea. She sighed and wrote. *I'm sorry I can't come to La Pramousel. You'll forgive me, won't you?* She knew very well that she was running away and in defiance of her own emotion she wrote *Of course we won't see each other again, Clay, but I don't need to say that I will not forget you.* She put the pen down and stood up, looking at the painting. After a moment she called to Madame Malet and asked for wrapping paper and twine, and together they packaged the canvas and put it with the two valises. Then Hilda went again to stand by the window, holding back the curtain with one hand, and looked out at the red tile roofs, the blue-shadowed houses. She stood by the window from which for days she had watched the sun rise and set. She stood with an empty feeling looking at the sea and the sky and the houses as if they were objects on a picture postcard, then she let the curtain fall in place and turned away. She came back to the goldfish bowl and the unfinished letter. She sat down beside the table, looking at the sheet of paper nearly covered with her careful writing, then she took up

the pen and quickly added : *Clay, I'm sorry I did not meet you sooner*, and signed it, *Hilda*.

X

CLAY had waited nervously at La Pramousel, and the letter from Hilda relieved him immeasurably. He felt light-hearted and gay ; he was free again of tension. Another chapter had been closed, he thought, as he returned happily to his painting, devoting himself entirely to it. He would have written her a note, but she had given him no address, and a day later he had forgotten all about it. He settled himself for months of work in the indolent, brilliant south of France.

The weather remained hot late into the fall. The sun burned on the Côte des Maures, the beach reflected metallic fire, and the red sand was sifted particles of burning iron, unbearable to their feet. They would go to the edge of the water in *espadrilles* and leave them lined on the beach as on a Japanese doorstep while they swam. The warm water was milky in texture and rolled smooth as oil upon the beach. There was always sunlight, and from early in the morning until the sun was low in the west toward Toulon, Clay painted. He went often to Bormes. He painted the hill town from many perspectives and soon he was known at the café there and was allowed to wash his brushes at the sink behind the bar.

Now Clay began to apply what he had learned unconsciously in his years in France ; he worked away from the early training of academic schools in America. He knew the background of the movement in modern painting. He had studied the works of the impressionists. When he had first arrived in Paris he had gone to the Louvre to see Manet's *Olympia* ; he had examined the succession of Monet's technical analyses of the lily pond. For a time Cézanne had inspired his color, and because of Cézanne he had once lived in a village near Aix-en-Provence where he drank *vin cuit* and painted the iron-gray hills, the clear-lit fields and dusty landscapes of Provence. Then he had turned himself from imitation ; in a period of stagnation he had seen the works of Les Fauves and followed them through the pro-

gression of Cubism, the three-dimensional exactitude of Picasso's forms, to the expression of myriad individualities in which he found no direction. For a long time he had looked on modern painting as something apart ; he could admire the subdued studies of Bracque, the precise technical exercises of Pierre Roy, without a responsive freedom in himself. But now, slowly, the influence of all the paintings he had seen in the museums and in the galleries along the Rue de Seine was making itself felt, and very suddenly Clay found that his attitude had changed and he could discard the academic training of his early education ; he could free his mind from its discipline. So the hill town on the Côte des Maures became his field of experiment. He returned to it day after day and his room in the hotel now was crowded with canvases which occasionally he would take down to the *salon* for Guy and Roger and Alice to comment upon.

"Ah, that ees bettaire," Roger would say. "Clye, now you are artiste peintre."

"You're working toward something, Clay," Guy said. "Keep at it."

In the morning Sara would awaken Clay, bursting into the bedroom like a gusty mistral, seizing his hair and shaking him, calling him "Mon petit oiseau," teasing him and not leaving the room until his eyes were open wide to the sunlight.

"Levez-vous, paresseux, levez-vous," she would cry, her eyes deep in her fat red cheeks as she bounced across the room to his bed, catching his hair and pulling it in a furious caress, a brutal enticement, with her deep chest laughter ready for his protests.

Then Clay would go down to the beach with Guy, racing across the sand, already hot in the sun, to the water. One night the mistral had blown wildly in the trees along the coast, rattling a loose tile on the roof of the hotel, but the next morning the air was still and the beach was washed smooth and wet and gleamed orange in the sunlight. Near the water line a film of azure stretched to the far end of the beach against the rocks, a deep blue tipped with gauze-like white, curled by the sun to crinkled shapes ; a pale gelatinous heap of medusae from which came the tart saline odor of fish.

"What's that stuff?" Guy asked, peering at it with his broad nose wrinkled. "It's something dead, Clay!"

"What a wonderful color against the sand," Clay said. "They're baby jellyfish, or jellyfish in a transitory stage, something like that. I suppose they were killed by the mistral and washed up on the beach."

"Do they bite?"

"They're dead, you idiot."

"There might be some live ones in the water," Guy said, shaking his head. Poised, he pushed at the heap with one toe, then leaped back. "They feel like corpses. I'm not going swimming."

And Guy sat on the beach, well away from the mound of blue that was fading in the sun like a dissolving stain, while Clay waded into the water, now cold and opaque from the mistral. As he swam slowly parallel to the shore Guy sat on the beach and drew designs in the thick sand with his toe.

One day, late in the afternoon, when they were still on the beach in the amber twilight, a canvas-covered van decorated with mystic astrological symbols drew up before the hotel. As they were starting up the lane Monsieur Ugobon met them, calling: "We have a *prestidigitateur* here who gives a show tonight, at seven o'clock."

Roger and Alice came that night and sat in the *salon* with the Ugobons and Sara and Monsieur Lepesche and a dozen people from along the coast, to see the show. The *prestidigitateur* was a short man with thick white arms protruding from rolled-up sleeves, and soft, well-tended hands. He had black hair brushed in a flat pompadour and dark bright eyes which held his audience as he stood in the salon on a portable platform and performed card tricks. He juggled and sang songs, and did tricks with colored ribbons, while a tired-looking blonde woman in Turkish pajamas stood at his side mechanically smiling at the audience and handing him his props. For his climax the *prestidigitateur* caused the girl to disappear, very obviously through a trapdoor of the platform on which he stood, which was screened off for an instant during the trick. When the performance was over

Clay asked the magician to join them in a bottle of wine and the Ugobons also came and sat on the *terrasse* with them. The weary blonde draped a street coat over her shoulders.

"Ah — Americans," the *prestidigitateur* said. "Touring in France, Monsieur?"

"No, we live here," Clay said.

"A citizen of France, Monsieur?"

"No."

"A citizen of the world, then? Yes, it seems that you Americans have no country of your own. You are internationals." He nodded solemnly and sipped his wine.

"I would like to see America," Monsieur Ugobon said. "I would like to go to America and see the tall buildings."

"America is a great nation, certainly, a great industrial nation. Are you aware, my friend, that America has the riches, the fields and factories, to feed and clothe all the world?"

"I would like to see it." Monsieur Ugobon picked up his glass of wine.

"But France too is rich, Monsieur." The magician's small eyes watched Monsieur Ugobon. "In France also there is enough to feed every man like a king. No, better than that, like a banker."

"Well, there are many people hungry." Monsieur Ugobon sipped his wine, smiling at Clay. "If we all lived like bankers we would lose our appetites, don't you think?"

"Ah, my friend, it is very well to say that when you have food for your appetite. Otherwise it would not be so amusing."

"But I was making a joke," Monsieur Ugobon said. "Here, have some wine, Monsieur le prestidigitateur."

"Thank you." The magician drank in little sips. The blonde woman beside him leaned on the table, her tired eyes turned to the dusky sea.

"I suppose it wearies you, Madame, to disappear every night," Clay said. "You sit there now so disembodied."

"Pardon, Monsieur?"

"He said you seem tired, Emilie," the magician said. "Would you wonder at it, Monsieur, every night in a different

place, every day on the dusty road, all to earn a few sous ? And gasoline must be bought first, before food. I tell you, Monsieur, it is not a happy life for a woman, but what else can one do ?"

"Perhaps a more permanent work, where you could have a home —" Monsieur Ugobon suggested, with a glance at his wife.

"Where is this work, Monsieur ?"

"Well . . ." Monsieur Ugobon turned his head on one side and smiled.

"No, Monsieur, with all the riches of the world to feed me I cannot eat unless there is work, and there is nothing for me but my slight talent to mystify people who are already much perplexed."

"It's a strange world, indeed," Madame Ugobon said in her soft round tones.

"Strange, Madame ? No. Insane, yes, but it is us who are insane — not the bankers and the capitalists. Not the pawn-brokers. They know very well what they want and what is good for them. And they tell us what is good for us, too, and we believe them. Isn't that so, Monsieur ?"

"I don't know much about these political matters," Monsieur Ugobon said, shaking his head.

"Well, you know that you must borrow money from the bank and pay high interest. You know that you must work hard all day to earn a profit, isn't that true ?"

"It's true. Day and night, in fact."

"And each month a little less money, yes ? Each month a little less interest paid and much more owing, isn't that so, Monsieur ?"

"Times are not good, certainly."

"No, times are not good, and times will never be good for you and me, my friend, as the world is now. Do you want to know what will happen ? — After a while there will be still more interest to pay. There will be amortization payments that will not be met and then, Monsieur, the bank will take your hotel. Oh, you may think that conditions will improve, that there will

be more tourists, perhaps, but look around you. Are there more tourists than last year?"

"No."

"There are very few, isn't that so? Last week I was in Nice and I read in *l'Eclaireur* a statement of the Mayor that hundreds of tourists were leaving the south of France each week. Listen, I saw fighting in the street there. They were shouting 'France for the French,' fighting the police."

"Rioting in Nice?" Roger leaned forward.

"It was because of the report that a bank had bought bonds of the Bayonne pawnshop which were worthless. It was because of this that the people went to get their money and they were beaten by the police." The magician drank more wine, looking at Roger. "Ah, this pawnbroker of Bayonne, Monsieur, he was a cancer, Monsieur, a financial cancer spreading from Bayonne through all the tissues of France, and many pocketbooks have suffered." He turned to Monsieur Ugobon. "You see, the people demand their money from the banks and the banks must have funds to pay them. So what will they do? They will take your hotel, Monsieur, you can be sure of that, and then what will you do?"

"When that time comes . . ." Monsieur Ugobon shrugged.

"Yes, when that time comes you will starve. You will starve as the working class today is starving. You will find that there is no place for you in this world — no place for the simple man with a few francs knotted in his sock and a small hotel where no one can afford to live, even at twenty francs a day."

"You are very pessimistic, Monsieur," Monsieur Ugobon said, frowning. "As for me, I have more confidence in France."

"But I too have confidence in France." The magician leaned forward, his bare arms crossed before him on the table. "I, Monsieur, have confidence in the French people, as you have. When you say you have confidence in France, do you mean that you have confidence in the government, the government which at every meeting increases your taxes, which intrigues with a malodorous pawnbroker? Of course not. Within a year five cabinets have fallen — it seems that in fact no one has confidence

in the government. Then what do we trust, you and I? We trust the French people, isn't that so?"

"Naturally."

"And we are the French people. — The future of France depends upon us, Monsieur. France is not the government. France is not the capitalists, but us, the people who work and grow the food and make the clothing and the machines that make the clothing. We make those things for ourselves, Monsieur, and who but we should have them? Listen to me. Some day, and some day very soon, the workers will see the truth. They will demand what is theirs. They will take the factories and give clothing to those who need it; they will give food to the hungry. They will not need to think of selling at a profit. No. There is food enough and there is clothing enough for all to use. It is there for everyone and everyone must have it."

"You talk very much like a revolutionist, Monsieur le prestidigitateur," Monsieur Ugobon said.

"But do I talk like a sensible man? Answer me that?"

"Well — perhaps. I don't know much about these things."

"But don't you want to know more? It's your own life we are talking about, comrade. Don't you want to learn?"

"Perhaps. Yes, I do."

"Well, you can read. I have with me some little books, some brochures. Read them, my friend, and then see what you think. Read them carefully and see if they do not answer your problems. Come with me a minute." The magician stood up.

Monsieur Ugobon looked across at his wife, smiling.

"Come, come," the magician said, and Monsieur Ugobon got reluctantly to his feet, and with a backward glance over his shoulder at his wife, walked with the magician around the side of the hotel toward the canvas-covered van. The blonde woman gave them a pale smile and drew the coat closer around her shoulders, standing up.

"Bon soir, Messieurs-dames," she said in a monotone, and followed Monsieur Ugobon and the magician toward the van.

"Well," Alice said. "That man *is* a magician." She looked after the *prestidigitateur* with a contemplative expression, sud-

denly turned to Roger. "Listen, Roger, this is a good time. Why don't you read your poem for Clay?"

Guy Hart snorted. He had sat silent, the pupils of his eyes large and black in the dim light.

"Why not? Damn you, Guy, don't be so supercilious. I think he'd like to hear it, Roger, and Clay, you must hear it, too. Why don't you recite it, Roger?"

"Eet ees not with me, Al-ees."

"But don't you know it by heart? — He finished it yesterday, Clay, and we're going to Paris right away to have it published."

"Right away?"

"Maybe tomorrow."

"Go and get it, Roger," Clay said.

"Oh, Clye, you do not want."

"Oh, Roger, go on," Alice said impatiently, and he obediently stood up, very tall, with his arms protruding long and earth-red from the short sleeves of his *maillot*. He moved lazily off down the road to his villa and returned with the pages of manuscript, in longhand, rolled like a scroll in his hand. They went into the salon and he sat down in a chair a few paces from the table, facing them, and began to read slowly in a deep, theatrical voice, with measured pauses in which he rolled his eyes up to look at them. His voice lingered over the words, caressed them pompously with a suggestion of a *Midi* accent, and it was difficult to follow the sense of the poem in listening to Roger, in watching the animation of his broad red face which yet was static and not alert, a gentle, considered enjoyment of his ego that almost excluded his listeners. As he read Roger would look at them, his eyes the black dots of punctuation before proceeding with the next verse. And when he had finished, when the last long-whispered phrase had fallen in the silent room, Guy moved his feet restlessly and threw back his head, saying: "The poor man eats the rich man's vomit. Jesus!"

"I think that's a good line," Alice said, her small, pinched face intent in the lamplight.

"It's puerile," Guy said harshly. "It's superficial."

"What does he say, Al-ees?"

"I said it's childish," Guy said. "Enfantin."

"Enfantin!" Only Roger's eyes moved, opening wider.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Roger," Alice said, her fists clenched white on the table.

"You don't *like* my poem, Guy?" Roger's soft lips hung open and he leaned forward, his large head magnified by slanting shadows, huge above his narrow shoulders.

"He didn't even understand it, Roger," Alice said. "It's a fine poem."

"As poetry some of it may be all right," Guy said, reaching for his glass of rum.

"Don't you like it, Clay?"

"Oh, very much, Alice."

"Guy," she leaned over the table toward him. "You have the most damnably jealous disposition I ever saw."

"Jealous? Of Roger?" Guy laughed.

"But what ees the mat-ter, Guy. Why don't you like my poem?"

"Listen, Roger." Guy put his glass down. "To write of a subject like that takes strength, vitality — and knowledge. It can't be done with dainty phrases and *recherché* imagery. It has to be violent, passionate. It has to come out of suffering, not from the experience of a *petit bourgeois surréaliste*."

"What nonsense, Guy. Roger is class-conscious and you know it. Don't you think he's suffered, and starved? Don't you . . ."

"Wait, Al-ees." Roger held up one hand. "Let me talk to heem."

"Let's forget it," Clay said.

"But leesten," Roger said. "Guy, my family are peasants. I was born near Grenoble and I worked with my hands in the fields. I drove the wagons to town on market days. . . ."

Guy leaned over and poured more rum in his glass.

"When I went to the university at Grenoble I worked at night in a café, in the kitchen, to pay my way. And when I took my service militaire I took it in the merchant marine, Guy. Not in

the navy, you understand, but with the sailors of the merchant fleet. And after that I went to Paris. . . ."

"And read Tristan Tzara's Dada manifesto," Guy said with a smile.

"Let him talk, Guy."

"Guy, I don't know." Roger rubbed his big hands together. "I don't know what to say to you. I don't like how you talk to me."

Guy laughed, and the dimples were deep blue shadows in his lamp-lit cheeks. "Go ahead and write what you want to write, Roger. Get it off to the *Nouvelles Littéraires* so everyone will see it and there'll be a discussion. That's what you want, isn't it? Of course that's why you wrote it, to hear people say: 'So, Roger, now you are Communiste.' — Isn't that so?"

"Al-ees," Roger said in a low, stifled voice, "I theenk I should heet heem."

"Why don't you?" Now they both stood up, facing each other. Guy was smiling and Roger's big soft face was contorted; his hands hung limply at his sides.

"Sit down, both of you," Clay commanded.

"He said he wanted to hit me," Guy said softly. "Why don't you, Roger?"

"Al-ees, what to do? Al-ees, let us go home."

"Guy, you're drunk," Alice said. "You owe Roger an apology and when you're sober he'll expect it."

"That ees true, Guy," Roger said. "When you are sobre."

Guy laughed again, cruelly, and reached for his glass.

"Al-ees, allons-y." They went out into the *bistrot* and, passing the bar Roger reached over and took a bottle of wine from a shelf behind it. His hands were clenched on the neck of the bottle as they walked along the road beside the railroad tracks toward their villa. Roger walked jerkily, his muscles taut. He was breathing quickly, and there was a slight catch in his breath. Suddenly he stopped.

"Al-ees, I should have heet heem."

"Oh no, Roger."

"Yes, why didn't I heet heem!"

"Come on, let's go home." She put her hand on his arm, but he broke away from her. He raised the bottle of wine and hurled it crashing upon the railroad tracks. Splintered glass and wine splashed upon his trouser leg. Now he was sobbing, saying : "Al-ees, I am angry. Je suis fâché. I should have heet heem."

Alice put an arm around his slender, swaying waist and they walked together toward the villa. She was saying soothingly : "Roger, you shouldn't pay any attention to Guy. He doesn't understand. You can only disregard people who don't understand. Guy is not sympathique."

"Non. C'est vrai, il n'est pas sympathique. But, Al-ees, I should have heet heem. — Al-ees, I was afraid to do eet. J'avais peur, vous comprenez, j'avais peur. . . ."

"Oh, Roger, you baby, kiss me !" They had halted by the gate and, on her tip-toes, Alice pressed her small tight passionate face against his.

xi

MANY weeks went by, swift, idyllic. Roger and Alice returned to Paris and Clay lingered on without any sense of time. Guy, too, remained and they lived quietly, drinking little. Now there were many canvases covered with luminous paint in Clay's bedroom ; many further studies of the hill town and one sketch of the quay at Saint Tropez, where Clay had gone one afternoon to sit and drink champagne cocktails at the café on the waterfront where he had sat with Hilda at the fête of La Bravade. There was a vague, a pleasant nostalgia to sit at the same table by the hedge, to be served by the same waiter with the paler sun gleaming on his bald head. But it made Clay restless and that evening he thought that it was time for him to return to Paris, to arrange his new line of work, to study and analyze and develop it in his studio. Sitting in the garden after dinner, he said : "Guy, I'm going back to Paris pretty soon."

"Back to Paris ? Maybe I'll go too. I've had enough of this climate."

"I thought you were going to Barcelona."

"Well, maybe I will."

The next morning they were having breakfast in the *bistrot*. They had been swimming in the milky water and now, shaved and animate, they sat at the enamel table in a square of sunlight eating croissants and drinking the tart, chicory-mixed coffee. They watched the morning train rumble down the incline to the station and start away again toward the blue tunnel and then they saw Monsieur Ugobon returning from his morning duties as chef de gare, trudging over the red clay with his cloth hat on the back of his head. He stamped into the *bistrot*, called "Une lettre pour vous, Monsieur 'All," and tossed an envelope on the table. It was postmarked Paris and Clay with sudden excitement recognized the handwriting as Hilda's. He ripped open the envelope.

Dear Clay : I have thought of you often, and I can't go away without thanking you once again. Now that it is all over and weeks in the past I realize how presumptuous it was of me to ask so much of you and how generous you were about it. I said once that I had completed my European education. Well, now I'm going home — sailing on the seventh for America. I have my tickets and my visa and now for a few days I am just suspended in mid-air, waiting. If you should ever want to write to me, Clay, a letter will reach me at Dorchester, New Hampshire. So goodbye, with the gratitude and love of

Hilda.

"Guy, what day of the month is it?"

"Oh, I don't know. What month is it?"

"Monsieur Ugobon, quel jour du mois?"

"Le quatre."

"The fourth of February," Clay said slowly.

"Why? What difference does it make?"

"Guy, I'm going to Paris. Do you want to come with me?"

"Maybe."

"Well, make up your mind."

"Why? What's the hurry?"

"I'm going today."

"Today? What's the matter? Bad news? —"

"No. — Oh, nothing like that. — No, but I want to be in Paris tomorrow. How about it, Guy, if you want to go, get packed. I'm starting in an hour."

"Clay, we couldn't get there by tomorrow."

"Sure we can. We'll drive all night if necessary."

Guy looked at Clay's flushed face, smiling. Clay's eyes were bright in his angular face; his nerves were on edge with excitement. Later, strapping his canvases together in his room, he was clumsy and Sara, who had come to help him, laughed and teased him. In the kitchen below Madame Ugobon bustled about, a little unnerved by the sudden break in routine, preparing a luncheon she had insisted they take with them in a cardboard box, in the box her new corsets had been packed in.

When the canvases were stowed in the car with their suitcases there was a little tableau in the *bistrot* with Sara and Monsieur and Madame Ugobon there for the scene of farewell, shaking hands, wishing *bon voyage* and at the last minute, everybody laughing when Monsieur Ugobon insisted they take a bottle of rum with them, while Guy insisted they open it and sample it first. He filled five glasses and they drank a toast to Madame Ugobon and to Monsieur's cuisine, and then they were in the car and away on the winding road toward Toulon.

"That's a place I'm coming back to, Guy," Clay said. "Madame Boudin's in Avignon, the Ugobons in La Pramousel — those are places to remember, aren't they?"

"Well, I'd been there long enough," Guy said. "I'm glad to get away."

Now they were on the open road, more than eight hundred kilometers from Paris, driving through the dry bright air of the *Midi*, turning off at Toulon toward Aix-en-Provence. Guy went to sleep in the pale sunlight and Clay drove very fast. He knew the road well from a dozen trips to the south of France, and he knew the countryside, but still the beauty of the blue-gray hills near Aix was as fresh to him as when he had first seen them, when he had first come south to paint them.

They reached Avignon in time for lunch, and ate at a *brasserie*

near the Place Clemenceau, with a view of the high mass of the Palais des Papes beyond. A bottle of Chateauneuf-du-Pape, hors d'oeuvres variés, and coquille d'écrevisse, the speciality of the region, and Guy sighed deliciously and stretched his arms wide.

"Clay, let's stay over in Avignon tonight and drive on tomorrow."

"No." Clay saw Guy smiling and added: "I want to be there early tomorrow."

They drove on. Often Guy wanted to stop for a drink but Clay shook his head. But in Montélimar they paused at a roadside café and Guy drank rum, and as they started away he bought a box of nougat from a candyshop along the way. He sat crunching the candy, gazing dolefully at the bleak winter landscape as they raced on toward Lyon. And after Lyon it was growing dark. Clay turned on the lights.

"Damn it, Guy."

"What's the matter?"

"Look how dim the lights are — I haven't put any water in the battery in ages."

By the time they reached Macon it was night and the lights spread only a faint glow on the road ahead of them. Clay stopped the car on the quay, in front of the same café where he had bought a bottle of brandy before.

"I suppose we'd better stay in Macon tonight, Clay."

"I don't know. Let's eat."

They drank Beaujolais supérieur with dinner and afterwards eau-de-vie and Clay sat looking out at the lights on the river-front, silent and depressed.

"Let's stay here," Guy said. "What difference does it make?"

"No, wait. — Look, Guy, there's going to be a moon."

"What of it?"

"Why, we'll drive by moonlight."

"Clay, I think you're out of your head."

"Garçon, l'addition, s'il vous plaît." Clay paid the bill and stood up. "Come on, Guy."

"Clay, what's the reason for all this rush ?" They were crossing the street to the car.

"It's the first time in years I've ever really had a reason for going somewhere," Clay said.

"What's the reason ? — Is it a woman, Clay ?"

"Never mind. Get in, Guy."

"You masculine men make fools of yourselves," Guy said petulantly as he got in the car. Settled in the seat, he took a bottle from under his overcoat.

"What's that ?"

"I brought a little eau-de-vie along."

"Did you steal it ?"

"No, I paid the waiter. — Have some ?"

Clay drank some of the clear, burning liquor and put the car in gear. The moon was rising, orange-colored and nearly round, and still the headlights gave illumination enough to follow the road, at reduced speed. After they had passed Chalon-sur-Saône Guy went to sleep with the bottle cradled in his arms. The lights had faded into the strengthening moonlight and to drive Clay must lean far over the wheel, straining his eyes. It was tiring and often he had to stop beside the road for a moment's relaxation, to take the bottle gently from Guy's lap and gulp the fiery eau-de-vie. Once he stopped on a high ridge. It was near Saulieu, in rugged country ; the slope was covered with furze and stunted trees like the moors of Scotland and in the moonlight there were distorted shapes seeming to move on the broad ridge. Clay sat on the running board of the car, smoking a cigarette and looking down into the shadows of a valley. It was silent, but for the sporadic rumbling of water boiling in the radiator. The light of the full moon flooded the ridge and looking up, space seemed almost tangible, finite, to Clay, with a clear-lit cloud solitary to the left. But he could not sit still long ; there was an impelling urge to be again in motion, to cover as quickly as possible the miles of timeless road that separated him from Paris. He started the engine and Guy awoke, reaching for the bottle.

"Where are we now, Clay ?"

"God knows. About two hundred and fifty kilometers from Paris."

"How far is that?"

"Over a hundred and fifty miles — a kilometer is five-eighths of a mile."

"How late is it?"

"About two o'clock."

Guy leaned back with a groan and Clay drove on. They passed through Auxerre, lightless in the night, with the cathedral a shadowy mass in the moonlight, the river glistening below. Clay was near exhaustion ; his eyes were swollen from watching the road in the flickering light and only the *eau-de-vie* sustained him. He could not read the signposts in the faint light and at Montereau he missed the road to Fontainebleau and drove toward Melun. And once, startlingly, a white shape loomed ahead of him, barring the road. He jammed on the brakes and stopped the car within a few feet of a railway crossing, with the bars down, and a moment later heard the mounting noise of the train ; the headlights flashed across his face. The engine, flaming in the night, and a long train of freight cars, passed by and then the gates were raised and he drove on, more cautiously, toward Paris.

At last the light strengthened, turned a harder color, and the day was dawning. Now Clay could see clearly and he drove fast, following the road through more populous regions, into the suburbs of Paris. The traffic became congested very soon and Clay slowed the car.

Ahead of them on the road moved a troop of cavalry, Moroccan spahis in red capes and turbans, braced in high-stocked saddles with long rifles sheathed at their knees, and Clay remembered the troop he had seen late at night in Vienne months before riding silently and mysteriously along the river road. Traffic was delayed by the troops ; once they passed a group of Senegalese infantrymen, with red fezzes on their heads, their smiling mouths pink stains in blue-black faces, mustard-colored uniforms rumpled on strong bodies. And again they came suddenly upon a tank, rumbling along a cross-road, its steel armor

reflecting the warm color of the dawn. They had nearly reached the city gates when they overtook the spahis and as they followed them in the noise of steel-shod hoofs ringing on the cobbles Guy awoke, exclaiming : "It looks like war time. What's it all about, Clay ?"

"I don't know. Manceuvres of some sort, I suppose."

They stopped at the customs booth outside the gates and Clay paid the tax on the gasoline in the car, then they drove on into the city, through streets quiet as those of a provincial town, with long vistas of tree-lined avenues nearly empty of traffic.

"What is today, a holiday ?" Guy asked.

"I remember reading something about a taxi strike, protesting against the gasoline taxes. See, there isn't a taxi in sight. I suppose that's why the troops are concentrated outside the city. There must have been trouble."

"What do you say we buy a paper ?"

On the way to Guy's hotel Clay drove up to the curb of the Champs-Elysées, near the Place de la Concorde, and went to a kiosk. He asked for *Le Matin*, and looking at the round pasty face of the newspaper vendor he opened his mouth and started to speak. It was Jean Barthelot, the cripple. His crutches leaned against the wall of the kiosk beside a small brazier. Waiting for change Clay glanced at the headlines: *Daladier to go before Parliament tomorrow ; Daladier to ask Investigating Commission.* He picked up the paper, reading *The Daladier Government will not succeed, it was . . .*

Hoofs struck musically on the pavement in slow-fast, fast-slow rhythm, the small quick hoofs of mules on the street, and now there came a soft whistle from the kiosk. Clay looked up at Barthelot's white, intent face and then over his shoulder at the mules, drawing carts along the street. There were soldiers, and seven mule-carts, and on the carts were machine guns.

On each side of the street men had stopped to look, and Barthelot's whistle was taken up, insistent, resentful, the familiar whistle of protest of Paris.

"See, Parisians," Barthelot cried. "That is what they are going to feed us — bullets instead of bread."

One of the soldiers looked at Barthelot, his face expressionless, his eyes squinted, and the mule-carts passed slowly by the kiosk ; the whistling continued.

Barthelot sat down behind his papers and watched the American return to the automobile at the curb. He watched the car start away and turn into the broad Place de la Concorde, and leaning forward, he spat over the black-inked paper to the sidewalk, remembering the rainy afternoon in the police station of Plaisance, remembering his brother in the prison cell. Tacked to a tree, near enough for him to read, was a placard of the League of Patriot Youth, announcing a mobilization at the Hôtel de Ville tomorrow. His brother Paul would march with the League. He would mass with them in the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville to shout *France for the French*, to stir the fever-burning nationalist blood of fascism. And the Croix de Feu would march, and the Royalists. The sixth of February would be a day of crisis.

Clay left Guy at a hotel on the Right Bank and drove to the Rue d'Alésia. As he was unpacking his canvases from the car he heard his name called and Madame Bernard hurried toward him.

“Ah, Monsieur ’All, vous êtes de retour.”

“Bon jour, Madame. Que de nouveau ?”

“Il y a des lettres.”

“Bon.”

Madame Bernard helped Clay carry the canvases to the *pavillon* in the garden. Clay opened the door and stepped into the breathless studio. At once he went to open the windows. The room smelled musty and there was dust thick on the table, the divan and the stove.

“I’ll clean for you,” Madame Bernard said, “and build a fire.”

“Later,” Clay said. “I’m going to sleep now.”

Madame Bernard went to get his mail and while waiting for her Clay unstrapped the canvases and lined some of them up against the wall. He sat down by the table, looking at them. His head ached and the paintings merged together in geometric patterns, spinning before his eyes. His head drooped, and he sat up with a jerk when the concierge opened the door, saying

“voilá,” and tossed several envelopes on the table. One of them bore a Texas postmark and Clay opened it, with an effort focussing his eyes on his Aunt’s small handwriting. *I was so glad to hear from you, Clay. Please write oftener. Your letters mean a great deal to me.* Clay rested his elbows on the table, the letter spread in the dust in front of him. *Papa’s health is not very good and the doctor told him he should retire, but Papa won’t bear of it. He’s worried now about his investments.* . . . Clay slipped forward and went to sleep with his head on the table.

XII

To return to America would be an escape from impermanence if only in not living in hotel rooms, Hilda James thought as she looked at the gloomy dark wallpaper of her room in a cheap hotel on the Rue Jacob. Only to be able to avoid the succession of stiff impersonal rooms in which she had lived for a year would be to make her life more settled, more definite, more concrete. Not to go each morning to the Café des Deux Magots for breakfast, no matter how crystal-like the glitter of sunlight on the marble tables and silver coffee urns, no matter how pleasing the warm gray stone of the church of Saint Germain des Prés opposite, would be to integrate her life by freeing it from a routine in which there was nothing given of herself, in which she moved shadowy and lonely against the background of the city. More than anything else now she wanted to change her environment, and lying on the bed in her small room in the winter twilight it seemed that the two days of waiting in the tense city would be unbearable. Now she had quit her job and she was poised for flight. She had two days to wait in a strangely ominous Paris. That afternoon there had been the clatter of the hoofs of cavalry horses in the street ; the noise had blown into her room where she had spent the day packing her trunk for America.

“Mademoiselle ?” There was a knock at the door and Hilda sat up, saying “Oui.”

“On vous demande au téléphone, Mademoiselle.”

“Au téléphone ?” Hilda stood up. “Tout de suite.” She

went to the door, hurrying past the *valet de chambre*, and ran down the carpeted stairs to the foyer. The telephone was in the *bureau* behind the counter. Hilda went to it, raised the clumsy handset to her ear : "Hello."

"Hello. Hilda ?"

"Yes, who is it ?"

"Clay."

"Clay ! Well — I didn't expect to hear your voice," Hilda said, but she had run breathless down the stairs, hoping it was he.

"I came as soon as I got your letter. I wanted to see you before you sailed. — Listen, can I see you tonight ?"

"Yes. — Oh, yes."

"What time ? How about right away ?"

"Now ?"

"In about fifteen minutes, as soon as I can get there."

"Yes, all right. I'll be ready."

In her room again Hilda threw open the trunk, dug in the heap of silk in a drawer for stockings, lingerie, and tossed them on the bed. She slipped off her dress, and tore a shoulderstrap of her slip as she jerked it over her head, rumpling her blonde hair. Now her body tingled in the warm room as she sat nude on the bed drawing on the stockings ; her cheeks were flushed and her fingers fumbled with the garter straps. As she fastened her brassière she saw herself in the full-length mirror of the armoire opposite ; her breasts raised, her head thrown back and the amber hair falling to her shoulders. Now she had forgotten about the sombre room ; the joy within herself had given life to it. She looked exultantly at the reflection of her slender figure, of her high-colored cheeks and bright, shining eyes. When she opened the wardrobe trunk she saw the striped silk dress, cut on the bias, which she had worn the first day she saw Clay in Saint Tropez, at the fête of La Bravade ; now there was only a happy memory of that day ; the morbid fear had gone forever and now seemed something imaginary, which she had never felt. She selected a tailored gray suit and put it on, smoothing the skirt to her hips, and then bent to the mirror above the bureau, applying lipstick, lightly rouging her cheeks. She was rummaging through a

drawer of the trunk for shoes when the *valet de chambre* knocked again, telling her that Monsieur had called. She pushed her feet into gray suede shoes, caught up a narrow-brimmed, high-peaked blue hat and pressed it down over the soft mass of her hair. Then she went out of the room which before had been desolate and inescapable, ran along the corridor, and walked more slowly down the stairs to the foyer. Clay was in the salon, reading a copy of *l'Illustration*; he looked up as she came to the door and an instant later was beside her, holding her hands.

"I never expected to see you again, Clay."

"Listen, I drove all night to get here — without any lights, too — following the moonlight to you, Hilda." He stepped back, holding her hands. "You look swell."

"Oh, I'm a strong, healthy girl now."

"What's this about your going back to America? No, Hilda, that won't do."

"Yes. I have my ticket. I'm all packed."

"Come around to the Deux Magots and we'll have a drink. I want to talk to you." He took her arm, pressing it, and they walked out into the street, the narrow, luminously gray Rue Jacob. It was only two blocks to the café and as they came along the Rue Bonaparte, Clay saw Guy Hart sitting on the *terrasse*, beside a brazier. In repose his face drooped and his full lips turned downwards at the corners and when he saw them he looked very directly at Hilda, without expression, then raised one hand and waved to Clay.

"Hello, Guy, this is Hilda James."

They sat at the table with him, against the warmth of the brazier, the thin charcoal smoke pungent in their nostrils. They sat forming a triangle around the table, the glow of twilight effulgent on the marble.

"So this is the reason we drove all night to Paris," Guy said, and it was an instant before he smiled and the dimple appeared like a scar in his cheek.

"This is the reason," Clay said, and Guy and Hilda looked at each other. Guy broke the silence first, saying: "I don't know why in hell I came back to Paris, Clay. I've been around a little

this afternoon and I've hardly seen anyone I know. The Dôme and Coupole are like cafés on the Grands Boulevards, with only fat French mamas on the *terrasse*, and Harry's bar is closed."

"The Trois de Coeurs?"

"Yes, I went there, but the shutters are up and there's a to let sign hanging in front." Guy talked with his shoulder turned to Hilda, and Clay smiled at the perverse jealousy of his friendship.

"The Trois de Coeurs was an old hang-out of ours," Clay explained to Hilda. "Harry is our favorite barman. He's been in Montparnasse for ten years or so."

"As long as I have," Guy said.

"When the best bars have to close there *is* a depression," Clay said.

Hilda leaned back in her chair as they talked, no longer with the quick elation, the light expectancy with which she had started from the hotel. She glanced at Guy resentfully, critical of his quick, arrogant voice, his decided mannerism, his veiled antagonism. Now, in a different environment, against the varied background of Paris, her former friendly intimacy with Clay seemed impossible to recapture, and she was not interested in the casual, comradely conversation between him and Guy.

"Look here," Guy said suddenly. "Where are we going to eat dinner?"

Hilda looked up quickly and Clay smiled at her. "Hilda and I have a date for dinner, Guy, maybe we'll see you around later."

"Oh, all right."

"Will you be around Montparnasse?"

"Yes, I guess so."

Clay had parked his car on the Boulevard Saint Germain. They left Guy at the table and walked to it, and when they were driving along the boulevard Hilda leaned nearer him, her shoulder pressing against his. "Clay, he's — you know, queer, isn't he?"

"Oh, he's somewhat homosexual."

"I don't like him."

"You'll get used to him. Guy doesn't like women until he gets to know them as human beings. I've known him for years, Hilda, and although he's pretty hard to put up with some times, I do it out of some sort of loyalty."

"Where are we going now?"

"To a little restaurant on the Rue de la Montagne Sainte Geneviève where we can sit in front of an open fireplace and eat pigeon in casserole with cream sauce."

Clay left the car on the Boulevard Saint Germain and they climbed the steep incline of a narrow cobbled street to the restaurant. There were only a few tables, with red-checked table-cloths, grouped around the glow of the fire. "This place has been a favorite of mine," Clay said. "Please like it. It used to be ideal, but then the women's club put it on their recommended list, but it still has good food and a few bottles of Chambertin, 1911, in the cellar."

But as soon as they entered someone called Clay's name, and he saw Roger and Alice seated near the fire. "Clay, you know too many people," Hilda whispered.

"Clay, come and sit with us," Alice called, and Roger stood up and put out his limp hand. As soon as Clay had made the introductions Alice began to talk, eagerly: "Clay, have you just come back?"

"Yes, today."

"And what a time to return. Clay, it's terribly exciting. Anything may happen tomorrow."

"What *is* the importance of tomorrow?" Hilda asked. "Everyone seems so much excited. It's something political, isn't it?"

"Tell them, Roger."

"Eet ees compliqué," Roger said, putting out his limp hand for a glass of wine. "Tomorrow Premier Daladier takes his new cabinet before the Chamber of Deputies for a vote of confidence. Perhaps he will succeed, perhaps not. The feeling is very strong."

"It's because of Stavisky," Alice said. "Already two Right-

ist cabinet ministers have resigned, and they dismissed the prefect of police. All the newspapers are protesting that."

"There are many theengs," Roger said. "They say that many important men were involved with thees pawnbroker, that their dossiers are too sensational to be told. There is no confidence now in the government. You see, Clye, the Chamber of Deputies, these six hundred men, they have taken the power of government for themselves. Today they rule France. Today the governments are at their mercy and five cabinets have fallen in a year. And after Stavisky, when people are pinched in their pocketbook, when they complain of high taxes and waste of public money, when they find that cabinet ministers, deputies, lawyers — many important men — were involved with Stavisky, they are enraged. They want to reform the government."

"There's been trouble already," Alice said. "There was a demonstration this morning near the Opéra and seventy-five were arrested, and today there was a fight with the Croix de Feu near the Madeleine."

"Paris seems to be surrounded with troops," Clay said. "We followed a regiment of Moroccan spahis into the city this morning, and I saw tanks and Senegalese outside."

"The spahis," Roger said, thrusting out his lips. "On May Day, 1919, it was the spahis who sabered the people in the Place de la République, Clye. They bring in the colonial troops to fight Parisians, and the Garde Mobile too are not from Paris — they are provincials."

The small restaurant was crowded ; voices rose and fell in a steady volume of noise and everyone talked loudly to be heard. There had been trouble in the Place de la République, the revolutionary quarter, on Saturday, Alice said. Strikers had attacked taxicabs and overturned them, had punctured tires, and there had been a clash with police after Communist speakers had addressed a meeting. A newsboy entered the restaurant and sold nearly all his papers, and in the *Paris Soir* Roger read aloud, laughing, the latest statement of the dismissed Prefect of Police to his men : *My children, I cannot tell you all I owe you. I can only ask one*

thing of you, that when you meet me in the street you come and shake hands with me. We are all good, honest fellows.

"All the papers protest the dismissal of thees man," Roger said. "You know, Clye, eet ees a strange theeng. The people of France are Left. Many are revolutionary. But the newspapers are for the Right. The newspapers are delivered body and soul to capitalism. — Ah, see here." He turned his eyes back to the newspaper. "Twelve Croix de Feu fascists were arrested at the demonstration today. Well, jail is the place for them."

After Roger and Alice left, Hilda and Clay sat looking at the embers of the fire, drinking a brandy twenty-five years old, cupping the balloon glasses in the warmth of their palms to bring out the bouquet. Clay wanted to show her the things he knew and liked in Paris, and he suggested that they go to the prize fights at the Grand Sporting Club. As they drove across the city to the Porte Saint Denis district, Hilda with a sinking feeling remembered that in two days she would be on the boat for New York, without recollection of her former anticipation of the voyage, of the fact of being in motion, of days of sunlight and sea.

They were late and he hurried her along an alley to the ticket window where a woman sat knitting. The entrance door opened immediately upon the hall, and they came into a great crowded space where there was smoke curling up in layers to the roof. They heard the bombilation of many voices, the resonant rumble of handclapping. Their seats were in the third row, in the circle of brilliance around the ring under the arc-lights, and the crowd was a dark mass behind them and a great shadow with a shrill voice in the gallery. In the *promenoir*, separated by a railing from the rows of seats, stood nearly fifty Moroccan spahis in bright red cloaks and black belts. As they took their seats the announcer was calling the names of the fighters and when he cried "Kazan," the spahis applauded and shouted piercingly.

"Probably one of their regiment who's fighting," Clay said, looking at the swarthy face of the boxer who stood with raised hands, a scarlet cape draped over his shoulders.

"Contre," the annunciér cried as the noise of the Moroccans died away, "contre Barthelot Jeune."

Clay looked at the mustard-brown hair of the other fighter, at his long jaw and small eyes. "I know that man," he said to Hilda. "He posed for a prize fight picture I painted and he stole some money from me — bound and gagged me in my studio."

Paul Barthelot sat in his corner looking at the dark face of the Moor. His hands were laced into the wine-red gloves and he held them clenched across his knees, the tips of his fingers dug into the leather. For this fight he would be paid four hundred francs, even if he lost — four hundred francs to spend on the Rue de la Gaité, four hundred francs to buy a brief security from the dread of surveillance. He knew that he would be beaten. The Moor had long arms and lean, wiry muscles. He was very fast, and Barthelot was slow and short of breath. He was not in condition to fight. In the afternoon he had paraded in bérét and Sam Browne Belt with the League of Patriot Youth, shouting *La France pour les Français* and *À bas les étrangers*. He had marched along the boulevard, singing the Marseillaise with the rest, carrying a small tri-colored flag, and tomorrow he would mass again with them in the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville. For a month he had belonged to the League ; occasionally jobs were provided for him and he earned a few francs. His strong and willing arms were needed in the League and they paid for them, but very little. Now he sat looking at the Moor, feeling tired, his muscles slack and flabby. After the parade he had gone home and found his mother and brother alone, sitting at the table in the kitchen with a bottle of red wine between them. *So you have marched with the Fascists today*, Jean Barthelot had said contemptuously, and Paul had stared at him, hard and cold and white, saying *I march with those who love France, and I march with them again on Tuesday*. And when his brother said *You should be in the Place de la République on Tuesday, with the militant workers where you belong*, Paul had turned in silence away from his brother. He had not wanted to argue, to expose the fact that he sought shelter for himself in mass strength, in furious partisanship for the popular ideal of nationalism. Then his mother said *a pneumatique came for you*, and it had been from the promoter, offering him the fight that night, as a substitute, to earn

six hundred francs if he won, four hundred if he lost. He had waved the letter in his brother's face, with resurgent bravado at the unexpected release. He had sneered at Jean sitting tranquilly with his glass of red wine, sneered at him and said *Why don't you go to Russia if you like it so well? We want only Frenchmen here.* Jean had smiled and drunk his wine in silence and Paul had burst out into the dismal street and tramped through the mud to the autobus line, the *pneumatique* clenched in his hand like a thousand franc note.

"Your man looks frightened," Hilda said. "See how white his face is?"

"He's not my man, Hilda. I'm in the Kazan camp."

At the signal of the gong a roar went up from the *promenoir*; red capes flashed as arms were raised and there was a line of tense dark faces along the railing. Barthelot's body was white under the arc-lights, and his neck was red, his elbows and knees faintly pink. As he sparred, moving flat-footed around the ring, the Moor darted about him and his gloves were movements of red light against Barthelot's white torso. Paul clinched, holding, and the referee moved in to separate them, calling something which Barthelot did not hear. As he stepped back the Moor's left stung his face and he crouched under a rapid succession of blows, protecting his soft white abdomen, which moved quick and vulnerable with his breathing like a fish out of water. The spahis were shouting, and there came the deep sinister undertone of booing from the gallery. Paul was against the ropes now, and Kazan swarmed in upon him behind his long, stinging left. There was a sickening pain in Paul's stomach and he sank gasping to his knees, his arms falling beside him, then bracing on the canvas. He looked up at the referee and suddenly, instinctively, muttered *foul*, but his word was lost in the great noise. The referee's arm was moving up and down now. On his knees, protesting, remembering the six hundred francs for the winner, Paul claimed foul loudly, gesticulating. The referee shook his head, still counting, and from the corner the second provided for him by the club was calling to him to get up. Slowly Paul pushed himself to his feet, at once backed away toward the ropes,

away from the long tireless arms of the Moor. He crouched again, helplessly, and there was a jarring blow on the side of his head, then again the jolting pain in his abdomen. He slipped down against the ropes, then very slowly slid forward on his face. He did not hear the referee counting.

"Was that fast enough for you, Clay? Are you happy? Is your blood lust satisfied now?" Hilda's hands gripped his arm. "He was terribly frightened, wasn't he?"

Now there were several men in the ring. The referee and a short fat man in a roll-neck sweater carried Barthelot, his legs dragging, to his corner. The spahis were leaping up and down behind the *promenoir*, their red capes flashing, and the deep boozing noise was insistent from the gallery.

Barthelot was rinsing his mouth with water. His gloves had been removed and he sat looking at the Moor dancing in the opposite corner, the red cape he wore for dressing grown hanging from one shoulder. The referee was leaning far over the ropes, talking to the gray-haired time-keeper; now he suddenly nodded his head vigorously, turning to look at Barthelot. The hall slowly became silent, and everyone watched the referee as he walked across the ring to Kazan's corner. The Moor's thin black eyebrows were raised. After the referee had spoken to him he began to talk fast, shaking his head, moving his fists up and down. The short man in the high-necked sweater clapped his hands sharply together and picked up the gloves from the canvas beside Barthelot.

"They must have allowed a foul," Clay said. "Look, they're putting his gloves on again." He looked over his shoulder at the *promenoir* where the spahis were shouting in a sudden frenzy, banging their fists on the railing. The hall was filled with noise that roared against their eardrums; they could not talk against it and looked at each other, smiling. Clay squeezed her hand and, seeing her parted lips, the intent arrested expression that seemed to set them apart in the crowd, he leaned over and kissed her. A man behind them shouted "Bis," and clapped Clay's shoulder.

The referee was in the center of the ring, both hands upraised,

and the boxers stood on either side of him, looking down at the canvas. It was a long time before the crowd quieted, while the referee shouted into the noise like whispering against a gale, the words blown back at him. Finally he could be heard and his voice rang out : "Attention." Three times he repeated that the gong had rung at the count of eight before the spahis in the *promenoir* ceased their protests and the crowd again turned its attention to the ring. The sound of the gong rang clear and the boxers moved into position, the Moor advancing slowly, with a frown.

Now Paul Barthelot was not afraid. Forced again into the fight, there was no longer the first dread of being knocked out. Now he was reckless, he wanted to spend his energy furiously while he could and when he sensed that the Moor was indecisive, hesitant, his morale affected, Paul charged in, swinging his fists widely, heavily. The straight long left stung his cheek, but his own right landed solidly on Kazan's shoulder and he became more confident. He stood straighter now, watching Kazan's left arm, manuevering past it to clinch and jab. When the gong sounded at the end of the round they were near Kazan's corner, slugging, and Paul walked back across the ring, erect, breathing fast, and now with his head clear, his muscles tense. The fat second in the frayed gray sweater was excited. He whispered in Paul's ear as he kneaded the muscles of his legs, and when the next round began there were no longer boos, but shouts of encouragement from the gallery. Again Paul advanced in confidence, meeting Kazan more than half-way across the ring, feeling the sharp left on his face as he bored in, by his solid weight forcing the Moor back until against the ropes he landed two blows on his body, hardly feeling the returns. Now Paul tasted blood and there was a weight against his eardrums, but he felt strong as he followed the dark, elusive body of the Moor around the ring, moving flat-footed and solidly poised in pursuit. And when the gong rang the noise of the crowd rose to crescendo in which now there was approval and enthusiasm.

"You haven't lost this fight yet," the second said as he fanned Paul with a towel.

"Lost it? No." Paul shouted. "No!"

He went back into the fight with a rush that carried them to the ropes where Paul covered himself against a succession of quick, stinging blows, clinched, then moved away, more cautious. The Moor was trying to hit his abdomen and Paul crouched in protection, but with his right arm ready to counter with a cross. And several times, as they sparred in the open ring under the bright lights, he landed solid blows on the Moor's body, felt the weakening resistance of the flesh to his fist. With each successful blow he was more confident, more eager for the next opportunity, and at the end of the round he was surprised that the gong had rung so soon. And for two more rounds he was alert and eager at the close, he was still forcing the fighting, trying for a knock-out. The sixth round was the last, and the noise of the gallery as it began made Paul forget the weary numbness of his legs, the gasping of his lungs. He went with desperation into the fight, swinging wildly with long sweeps of his right arm, now careless of his own protection as the Moor feinted, shifting out of reach. Paul followed him around the ring, his chin low between his shoulders, his tired arms poised, but Kazan avoided him, content to manoeuvre safely through the last round and win the fight on the points he had accumulated. When the final gong sounded Kazan was still in retreat and Barthelot, red-faced and weary, was following him dog-like from rope to rope.

Paul turned away toward his corner and raised his eyes to the gallery and the great noise. In spite of his weariness he felt aggressive, with a swelling confidence that brought him smiling to his corner, attuned to the noise that was the mingled praise of many voices. This was far from a jail cell in *Plaisance*; this was far from the contempt and suspicion of the police. Standing in the corner with his hands on the ropes he realized himself as one of the great mass above, as a Frenchman who had fought with credit in the eyes of other Frenchmen, who had won from them the esteem his furtive soul needed. He raised his clasped gloves to the gallery and nodded his head up and down.

The referee was polling the judges, leaning far over the ropes, but Barthelot stood looking up at the galleries as the second un-

ties his gloves. But now the noise died away into an expectant hush and Paul looked over his shoulder at the white figure of the referee, with both hands raised, in the center of the ring. The referee paused a moment, then swept both arms outward from his chest, one hand toward Barthelot, the other toward Kazan, shouting : "Draw."

Paul looked blankly at his second and Clay turned to Hilda saying : "I'll be damned."

The silence had lasted for only a moment, then there came a wild burst of applause from the gallery, shouting, whistling, hand-clapping, followed in an instant by a shrill cat-like sound from the *promenoir*, and Clay turned to look at the spahis. The red capes flapped like scarlet plumage as the dark men surged in agitation along the railing, waving their arms and shouting. One spahi, with head bent forward, was barking shrill phrases which made a special whining sound in the crescendo of noise ; the other spahis swarmed in behind him like a tribe of monkeys and one stood up above the rest, his boots locked on a lower rung of the railing. The referee had turned his back and stood on the opposite side of the ring from the spahis, and Kazan, with his cape draped around his shoulders, climbed through the ropes, the only figure in motion at the ringside. The Moors saw him, shouted his name, and suddenly pressed forward, over the railing, leaping from the *promenoir* over into the aisle, black boots reflecting light. In the hand of one man a dagger gleamed.

"Let's get out of here, Hilda." Clay caught her arm.

The leading spahi hesitated a moment in the aisle, the others packed close behind him, and all over the hall men were rising from their chairs, heads bobbing up until now there was a close dark mass of standing people around the scarlet-cloaked men. Paper fluttered down from the gallery, through blue layers of smoke, and a rolled-up newspaper hurtled downward and glanced off the turban of a Moor. All at once the spahis started forward, swarming over the seats, bursting through the crowd toward the ring.

Clay drew Hilda forward toward the aisle, but the crowd was

massed ahead of them, blocking their way, hemming them in between the ring and the advancing Moors. From the balcony a beer bottle fell in a gleam of light and struck the floor near the ring, and individual shouts of protest were heard in the angry noise. The spahis came on like charging troops, and now another sound was heard, shouts of "les flics, les flics," as from the entrance doors a squad of gendarmes hurried forward, elbowing through the crowd. The spahis had reached the ringside. Clay was shouldered aside and Hilda was aware of the smell of sweat, of bright black eyes and opened mouths in nut-dark faces. She turned toward Clay, raising her eyes to him, helplessly. She slid forward against him, fell against him, and limply slumped toward the floor, her eyes closing, her head falling back in a faint. Clay caught her, and held her tight as the crowd pressed back upon them, making way for the police. He saw the Moors retreat as the police advanced with batons ready ; no blows were struck. He saw the crowd fall back, returning to their seats, while the referee shouted for order from the ring. Then he stood alone with Hilda in his arms. An *agent de police* came toward him.

"Madame is hurt, Monsieur ?"

"She's fainted."

Clay picked Hilda up in his arms and the policeman went ahead of him, opening a way through the crowd to the doors and at last to the bright cold night. Clay carried her to the car and put her on the back seat, with her head low, and loosened the collar of her dress. After a moment she opened her eyes.

"Hilda, are you all right ?"

She murmured something, and he bent nearer. "What's the matter, Clay ?"

"You fainted." He stroked her hair back from her cheek.

"I'm all right."

The *agent de police* went across the street to a *café* and returned with a cup of black coffee. Clay helped Hilda to sit up and she drank some of the scalding liquid, then sighed. Clay sat beside her, his arm around her.

"Madame feels better?" the policeman asked.

"Yes," Clay said. He took out a ten franc note. "Voici, Monsieur l'agent, pour le café."

"Merci." The policeman touched his trim forage cap and shut the door of the car.

"Hilda, darling, are you all right? You frightened me."

"I feel better. It was the smoke."

"When we start moving the air will clear your head."

She lay back against the cushions, relaxed, as they drove across Paris. Now they were intimately bound together by their experience. When one laughed, they both laughed. Clay drove to Montparnasse, where the lights of the cafés were gaudy in the winter night. He parked the car on the Rue Delambre and they walked back to Le Dôme. The *terrasse* was crowded, and they passed among closely grouped people, the hum of discussion in their ears, and found a table not far from a brazier.

"When I first came to Paris," Clay said, "you could hardly find a French face hereabouts. There were Americans, English, Scandinavians, Japanese — but nary a Frenchman."

"France pour les Français," Hilda said.

"It was France pour les touristes then, but that was when it was not so expensive and you got lots of francs for a dollar — before the dollar was devalued."

"The world is nationalizing, isn't it? It's dividing up into little camps. It makes me glad for America."

"I haven't been to America in four years," Clay said.

"But you're going back soon — you said you were."

"Yes. Listen, Hilda. You mustn't sail so soon. When is it, day after tomorrow?"

"Yes. Are you coming to see me when you get to New York?"

"You mustn't sail."

"I have to, Clay. For one thing, I haven't any money."

A waiter hurried toward them and Clay ordered brandies. In front of them the sidewalk was a river of slow-moving people, and crossing the street he saw a girl in a green hat. Clay saw the moving spot of color through a gap in the crowd and watching it,

he glimpsed the face of the girl wearing it, recognized Arlette. It was Arlette Fabre, walking with a sailor ; he saw the scarlet pom-pom against the green hat, saw the youthful pink face of the sailor.

“Clay, what are you staring at ?”

He shrugged his shoulders and picked up his glass. Arlette with a sailor, in a hat green as spring, green as her eyes ; Clay remembered her eyes when he had last seen her, as she stood on the curb screaming at him, as her forlorn eyes watched the taxi carrying him away. Restlessly he lit a cigarette, searching in the crowd for the bright pom-pom of the sailor and the jaunty green hat. He heard his name shouted, with a start changed the focus of his eyes and saw Harry the barman standing immediately in front of him, laughing and waving one hand.

“Hello, Harry. Sit down — have a drink.”

“I will, Mr. Hall, thank you.” With him was Tom the Bum, in a ragged sweater, without an overcoat.

“Harry, what happened to the *Trois de Coeurs* ?” Clay asked.

“I had to close up. We was losing money. There ain’t enough Americans and English in Paris and the French didn’t come there, Mr. Hall. A Frenchman’s no good anyhow — sits all evening over one drink. I had a few South Americans, but not enough to get along.”

“Have a drink, Harry,” Clay said.

“I’ll take Amer-Picon.” Harry’s moon-round face wore its constant smile. He waved a fat hand to a waiter. His shirt was soiled and there was several days’ growth of beard on his red face. Tom the Bum sat indolent beside him, with drooping underlip.

“Things is plenty tough in France,” Tom said. “Christ Jesus, you can’t even sell a dirty postcard now-a-days. I got a chance fer a chasseur’s job, though.”

“Alors, Clye, vous êtes de retour, hein ?” Clay looked up and saw Arlette standing across the table from him, her hands on her hips, her face flushed and hot with liquor. “Alors, enfin de retour.”

“Hello, Arlette,” Clay said. “Comment ça va ?”

"Et c'est vous qui demandez, vous ? Pige-moi ça." Her eyes were puffy, half-closed. "Voleur ! Fripouille !" She put her hand on the sailor's arm. "Écoutes, il m'a volé mon phono, cet homme."

"Who is *she* ?" Hilda whispered.

"That's Arlette."

"Clye, dîtes-moi, où est mon phono ? Vous me l'avez volé, n'est ce pas ? Vous l'avez vendu, hein ? Eh, Américain ?"

"Arlette, j'ai oublié votre phonograph," Clay said, standing up.

"Oublié ! Oublié, vous dîtes ? Oh, non." She turned to the sailor, who stood looking at Hilda with a friendly smile. "Écoutes, mon ami, pour ton Arlette, donnes une correction à lui, à ce type-là."

"Qu'est qu'il y a ?"

"Il est voleur." Arlette swayed toward the sailor and he took her arm, saying : "Venez."

"Non, non."

He held her arm, drawing her away from Clay, still smiling at Hilda. Arlette, twisting away from him, lurched toward the table, crying : "Zut, alors. Je m'en merde." She spat at him, her face screwed up. Her hand knocked a glass crashing to the pavement.

"Attention, Arlette. Attention, les flics," the sailor said nervously ; an *agent* farther along the street was looking toward them. The sailor caught her arm and this time he pulled her away. Clay sat down and reached for his drink.

"Who was that, Clay ?" Hilda asked.

"An old friend," Clay said, smiling.

"So that's it. So I'm finding out something about your past, Clay."

"She came into the *Trois de Coeurs* a couple of times after you'd gone, Mr. Hall, asking for you," Harry said. "I wouldn't let her charge any drinks, though."

Clay nodded, and sat in silence looking at the crowd in the street, a dark mass against the lights of *La Rotonde* opposite. He no longer saw Arlette's green hat or the sailor's pom-pom.

He had a sick feeling of responsibility ; a certain uneasiness turned in upon him and he ordered more drinks and drank the brandy straight. Later he said : "Let's go somewhere else. Don't you want to ?"

"Do you ?"

"Let's get away from Montparnasse. Don't you find it depressing ?"

"Yes."

Clay counted the *soucoupes* and left money on the table, and they walked along the Rue Delambre to the car. Clay drove to the Rue de la Gaité and left the car on the corner of the Avenue du Maine.

"This is a workingman's quarter," he said. "It's more genuine, don't you think ? These people seem more real. Montparnasse is pretty awful."

"Because of that girl ?"

Clay looked at her sharply, then smiled. They pressed along the crowded Rue de la Gaité, Clay walking ahead of her, and turned into a *café* near the avenue.

"This makes me think of Saint Tropez, when I met you," he said, "making a way for you through the crowd."

They sat down at a table in the corner of a stuffy room with mustard-colored paneling, and Hilda asked : "Who was that girl, Clay ?"

"Arlette Fabre is her name." He looked at her directly. "She did upset me. — She lived in my studio for a while, but we couldn't get along and I made her move out. I've wondered what would happen to her, and now you see. — She was with a sailor."

"What of it ? What difference does that make ? — Oh, you mean you think she's a *poule* ?"

"I don't know, I feel responsible, though."

"Did you treat her badly, Clay ?"

"I suppose I wasn't very kind."

The Rue de la Gaité was noisy ; there was a more virile movement in the street than on the Boulevard Montparnasse, a strong healthy animal spirit among the people. They sat for a long

time, talking little and drinking steadily. Once Hilda said, suddenly, "Clay I think you're in love with her."

"With Arlette?" Clay shook his head and laughed.

"I think you are a little."

"No." Clay looked at her. "As a matter of fact, Hilda, I'm in love with you."

"Oh, Clay!" She laughed; her teeth like white quartz against her flushed face. After an instant she shook her head, almost imperceptibly, and her blonde hair moved against her cheeks. "You don't have to tell me anything like that, Clay."

"Damn it, I mean it. Why do you think I left the south of France? Why do you think I drove all night without any lights?"

"It sounds very romantic. Go ahead, Clay."

"Hilda, won't you ever take me seriously? Listen, I hurried to Paris to find you and tell you that you mustn't sail the day after tomorrow."

"I've got to sail. I have my ticket."

"Then tear it up." Clay put his hand on one of hers, and she turned her head, looking out the window at the bright-lit street. Her hand lay passive in his and when she looked at him again she asked: "Clay, what time is it?"

"About one o'clock."

"I'd better go home."

"Oh, no."

"Yes, I have a lot to do tomorrow. Get the check, Clay, will you?"

He sat back, taking his hand away. "You're so damned self-sufficient, Hilda, so damned matter-of-fact. How can I make love to you when you're always thinking of something else?"

"You don't want to make love to me anyhow, Clay. You're only drunk. — It's a drunken duty to you. And I do have to go home."

"I do want to make love to you and you're not going home."

"I don't want you to, Clay. I want to be let alone. — You understand that, don't you?"

"Yes, all right. I suppose so. — Garçon, l'addition." The

waiter came over and Clay paid him. They walked together to the Avenue du Maine. He did not speak, and when they were in the car, after he had lit a cigarette, Hilda said : "You're not annoyed with me, are you, Clay ?"

"Yes, of course I am." He turned to her with a quick smile.

"You won't be tomorrow."

"No." He put one arm around her shoulders, gently, and leaned back beside her. "I know how you feel about it, Hilda. You've closed up like a little clam and gone back into your shell. I suppose you think that if you do that you'll never be hurt again."

"Exactly."

"I would never hurt you, Hilda."

"No, I don't think you would." She looked out at the silent street. "Oh, I'm sorry, Clay. I'm all mixed up. Take me home and forget about me."

"I'll take you home, at least." He started the motor, but did not put the car in gear. "Turn around," he said, and when she shook her head he put the palm of his hand under her chin, his fingers along her cheek. "Turn around and kiss me, Hilda."

She tried to shake her head again and the warm texture of her cheek moved against his fingers. He turned her head slowly, with deliberate pressure, briefly saw her wide eyes, the pupils large in the dim light. Then her arms were around his neck ; he held her close against him and her lips were moist and tender upon his in sudden, complete submission that brought a breathless weight to his heart. Holding her, he stroked her blonde hair, her smooth cheek. He kissed her eyes and they were cold and wet.

"Hilda, you don't want to go home, do you ?"

"No." Her whisper was warm against his ear. He moved away from her, abruptly, and put the car in gear. One of her hands clung to his. Clay turned the car around in the empty street and drove rapidly toward the corner of the Rue de Vanves and the Rue d'Alésia.

XIII

SHE remembered her loneliness only as a contrasting measure of the deep, free emotion she now felt as she sat on the divan and

looked overhead at the ripples of sunlight and shade on the skylight. She felt at peace in the studio. It did not seem unfamiliar to her, but rather a concrete projection of something vaguely imagined far in the past, a page long since turned over. Clay was still asleep on the balcony and she sat on the divan beside the big round stove waiting while water boiled to make drip coffee. She sat looking at the plaster statuette on the bookcase, white as alabaster against the wine-red curtains, at the stacks of canvases along the wall and the dominant shape of the studio easel. She looked slowly around her, with a minute examination of each object as if to fix it in her memory, to prolong this moment and hold it always in her mind.

She lay back on the divan, her head on the pillow, looking up at the green leaves lying flat on the skylight. Clay was on the bed above, lying exactly parallel to her, and it seemed that she was still by his side as she thought of his sleeping face, his black-lashed eyes and rumpled black hair, the beard on his chin now rising blue as shadow. Late that night he had said to her with easy laughter in his voice : *Now you're in the same vicious circle again, Hilda*, and she had cried so passionately, so deeply feeling it, *I don't care, Clay, I'm glad*. Now she sighed, her lips curving in a sensuous smile, and stretched her arms above her head. The day before it had not seemed that she could ever again begin a day without a frown. Then she had wanted to escape to America, to run away to a narrow protected life, closing herself against the world, but now she felt that the only thing that was important was to be a woman.

She heard the quivering noise of boiling water in the kettle and went to the stove in the tiny kitchenette. As she was pouring water over the coffee she heard a stirring sound on the balcony, then Clay's quick awakened voice : "Hilda."

"Yes."

"Oh, I thought you'd gone." She saw his face on the balcony, beside the long sweep of the mulberry curtain. "Good morning, sweetheart."

"Hello."

"Come up here."

"I'm fixing breakfast. — Is there any cream for the coffee, Clay?"

"No."

"I can't find any butter, either."

"There isn't any. Come on up here."

"Darling, I have a lot to do. — Aren't you hungry?"

"Breakfast can wait. — You come here."

Blushing, Hilda put the kettle on the stove and went toward the stairs, holding up the skirt of his dressing gown, which was far too large for her. She ran up the stairs and threw herself on her knees on the bed beside him. His arm slipped under the dressing gown and he held her tight. "Hilda, do you still love me this morning?"

"Maybe. Do you me?"

"No."

They both laughed, and she threw her arms around his neck in a sudden ecstasy. He looked at her tense, expressionless face and kissed her very tenderly, and they lay together in the sunlight and shadow of the balcony until at last she said: "Oh, damn, the coffee will be cold. I'll have to make some more."

"No, we'll go out for breakfast."

"Don't you trust my coffee?"

"Well, there's no use putting obstacles in our way so soon. — Can you cook though?"

"No."

"You'll have to learn."

"Do they have a French Fannie Farmer?"

"I guess we'll go to restaurants," Clay said. "Let's get dressed. There's a lot to be done today."

"What?"

"We have to refund your steamer ticket."

Hilda turned her eyes to the pattern of leaves on the skylight. "I can't do that, Clay."

"Don't you want to stay here with me?"

"Yes."

"Well, then."

"But I can't, Clay — oh, for lots of reasons." She drew the

dressing gown around her and went down the stairs. Clay followed her and sat by the table, smoking a cigarette and watching her as she dressed.

“What reasons, Hilda ?”

“I have my ticket and everything, and I’m already packed — and I’m expected at home. I’ve written. . .”

“Those aren’t reasons. They’re only arguments.” He went toward her, smiling. “Hilda, those are just the trivial arguments of resistance, for the record, aren’t they ? Do you want to be persuaded, is that why you made them ? — Listen, we’ll stay here together in Paris for a few weeks, a few months, a few years. Or we’ll go away. We’ll go to the south of France again. Do you remember that villa we saw near Cannes ?”

“You mean the white one on the hill, above the bay ?”

“That’s the one. You said it would be a nice place to live, do you remember ?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s go there.” Clay put his arms around her and smiled down at her serious face. “How about it, are we going to turn your ticket in ?”

“I suppose so.” She smiled, and then they both laughed. Clay went to get his razor, and as he was shaving she stood leaning against the wall, watching him.

“You never intended for a moment to sail,” he said positively. “Did you ?”

“Of course I did, but . . .”

“But ?”

“Well, I wanted to be sure that you wanted me to stay, Clay.”

They had breakfast at the *café* on the corner of the Rue de Vanves ; brioche, feathery and yellow, and *café au lait*. The streets were silent and they sat together reading a newspaper Clay had bought. There were to be parades, demonstrations, protests, and that afternoon Premier Daladier was to go before the Chamber of Deputies. At the performance of *Coriolanus* at the *Comédie Française* there had been a demonstration and a violent denunciation of the government. It had been announced

that the Shakespeare play had been withdrawn and Molière's *Malade Imaginaire* would replace it.

Clay got his car and they drove through the ominous stillness to the Right Bank and arranged to postpone Hilda's sailing.

"And now," he said as they stood on the Boulevard Haussmann, "we'll go to your hotel."

"Why?"

"To get your baggage, of course. Hilda, you're moving into my studio."

"Oh, am I?"

"If you want to."

"I do." Now Hilda's cheeks were flushed and she entered joyously, with only a pretence of reluctance, into the adventure of arranging their lives together. Clay went up to her room with her, closed and locked her trunk and strapped her suitcases, and they followed the *valet de chambre*, with the trunk balanced on his bent back, down again to the foyer. They put the trunk and the suitcases in the car and drove again to the Quartier Plaisance, and when they stopped on the Rue d'Alésia Madame Bernard saw them from her window and came out into the court.

"Ah, Monsieur 'All, you are going away again?"

"No, Madame. We are just arriving. This is Madame, my wife."

"Your wife, Monsieur? I didn't know that you were married."

"We are just married. — Hilda, this is Madame Bernard, the concierge."

Madame Bernard's small black eyes glittered in her yellow face and she became at once unctuous, flattering, attentive, with her thoughts of the *pourboire* that would be given for her welcome to the bride.

"Monsieur 'All should have a wife. I have always said it, Madame. It is proper for a young man to marry, and a young lady so chic, so pretty. Madame, may the good God bless you with many children." She followed them to the studio, and after the trunk had been carried in, after she had made a show

of arranging the suitcases in a corner, Clay gave her ten francs and she went away smiling to tell the neighborhood the news of her *Américain*.

"And so they were married," Hilda said, standing by the table and taking off her hat.

"Yes, just as simple as that." He smiled.

"But she wasn't fooled. — She kept looking at my finger for a ring."

"Then we'll buy you a ring, just for Madame Bernard's sake."

Clay put the suitcases on the divan and unstrapped them and Hilda began to unpack, hanging her clothes in the armoire. Once she opened a drawer and looked at Clay, a heap of silks in her arms. "Ugh, Clay, perfume!" She hesitated a moment. "Is that Arlette's?"

"I suppose so."

"Did she live here too, Clay?"

"Yes, for a while."

"I don't think I'll use that drawer."

Clay laughed. "Now that's not consistent, is it? — Hilda, we both have a past, remember."

She smiled and began to pack the underclothes in the drawer and Clay walked over and stood beside her. He breathed gently on the wisps of blonde hair at the nape of her neck, kissed the white skin.

"Who was this other fellow, Hilda?"

"Why? — You never cared before."

"It was none of my business then."

"Now you mustn't get proprietary, Clay." She turned to face him. "Please don't be that way. — He's just nobody at all, he doesn't exist any more."

"Have you seen him again?"

"No." She turned around and leaned against the bureau, pushing the drawer shut. "Does it really make any difference to you?"

"Well — no." He rested one hand on her shoulder, smiling, and she said: "Our lives began together in Saint Tropez, Clay. That's all that matters, isn't it?"

"But still I'm curious." He laughed. "All right, let's forget it. — Listen, I'm going to paint you, Hilda. Will you pose for me?"

"I'd like to, Clay."

"I mean now. Sit down, I'll get out my paints."

She sat in a chair on the model stand and he painted a sketch of her head, lengthening the oval of her face and emphasizing the strong line of her nose, making her features patterned and angular against the bright indefinite mass of her hair. Late in the afternoon when the light had failed they sat together on the divan, drinking brandy, and looking at the canvas on the easel.

"But it's a caricature, Clay. It doesn't look like me at all. Clay, my nose isn't as bad as that."

"This isn't a portrait."

"Yes, I know, but I'm thinking of my vanity, not your painting."

The light was cathedral-like in the studio at dusk and they sat watching the shadows lose form as they merged into the gloom of night. A little before six o'clock they heard footsteps on the gravel path and then there was a knock at the door. Clay looked at Hilda and made a face, then walked over to open the door. It was Guy Hart. He entered with a vague nod and took off his hat, then saw Hilda and said, "Oh, hello."

"Sit down, Guy," Clay said. "Have a drink."

"All right." He perched on the edge of a chair. "Look here, what are you going to do for dinner?"

"Hadn't thought about it yet."

"I missed you around last night, Clay. Paris is lonely as hell now. I didn't see hardly anyone. — I don't think I'll stay here more than a few days. I think I *will* go to Barcelona."

"You look a little pale, Guy."

"I just got up. Haven't had breakfast yet. — Look here, you've got your car, Clay, let's drive out to La Villette, out by the stockyards. There's a café there where you can get the best steak in Paris."

"All right. How about it, Hilda?"

She looked at Clay, biting her lip, and he smiled. Later, as

they were driving across Paris toward the La Villette district she was beside Clay and Guy sat alone in the back ; she leaned near Clay, her shoulder pressed against him. "I'd rather we were just alone, Clay."

"So would I, but he'll drop out of the picture later. He always wanders off into the night after he's had a few drinks."

The restaurant in La Villette was quiet and warm ; beyond an arched doorway was the kitchen, the bleached slab of the butcher's table in view, the long hooded range beyond. They drank a full-bodied Bordeaux with the dinner and, their blood heated, their faces flushed, they watched the *maître d'hôtel* prepare crêpes suzettes, the clear blue flame sweeping over the silver chafing dish. Hilda and Clay sat looking at each other with flushed faces, talking a good deal, and Guy was silent, sipping the wine.

After the crêpes they drank brandy, and soon Guy became impatient, desirous to be in motion again, questing again through the city, and they drove back through the quiet La Villette district. But nearing the Place de la République there were bright lights and they could see a black mass of people. Clay turned off on a side street away from the square and finding an open road ahead he drove faster and the February wind whipped their faces. Hilda sank lower in the seat and slipped one hand through Clay's arm.

Then Clay turned a corner, suddenly, and a black van lurched out of the shadow toward them. Clay spun the wheel, jammed on the brakes, and there was a brief, sliding motion, then a jarring crash that made the car shudder. Hilda lurched forward, knocking her knee against the dashboard. There was a moment's silence, then a sudden harsh voice cried : "Idiot !"

"Oh, God," Clay said. "Now an endless argument." He opened the door and got out of the car, and Hilda saw the truck driver in a black leather apron descending from the high seat. They were at a dark corner, but farther along the street there were lights and she heard the music of a single accordion whining from a *bal musette*. Now there were people running along the street toward them.

"We've bent a fender," Clay said. The truck was unmarked,

but the driver, with his fists resting on his hips, stood talking in idiomatic French faster than Clay could follow, venting on him the charged venom of a day of labor, of nerves as strained and overwrought as the city of Paris that day. Clay listened, made an attempt at apology which provoked another onslaught of invective, then remained silent, his hand on the door of the car.

"Get in, Clay," Hilda said. "Let's get away from here."

"Ah, des Anglais," someone said. "Ils sont des Anglais." Now the car was ringed by faces, by faces in light gray color against dark clothing. "Non, Américains," another said harshly, and there was a woman's shrill voice, shrewish and partisan : "C'est Josef Jemotte."

"Get in, Clay," Hilda said. "Please."

"Yes, come on, Clay." Guy leaned forward, frowning, his hands on the back of the seat.

"C'est le camion de Josef Jemotte," the woman cried in a loud, challenging tone, and another voice, deeper, more controlled, said : "Dites-moi, Josef, il est abimé, le camion ?"

"Rien n'est cassé," Clay said. "C'est ma voiture qui est abimée."

All around the car there were faces staring at Hilda and she heard the phrase, *femme de luxe*, said with a spitting noise. Nervously she opened her handbag and took out a box of English cigarettes, cork-tipped, in a carmine, gold-edged box. She put a cigarette between her lips and a man beside her, a tall man whose face seemed all moustache as she indistinctly saw it from the corners of her eyes while appearing to look straight ahead of her, said in a low, insinuating tone : "Moi, aussi, je veux une cigarette."

Hilda struck a match on the dashboard and lit the cigarette, inhaled deeply.

"Voulez-vous me donner une cigarette, Madame ?"

She turned her head away as Clay got into the car beside her and stepped on the starter. He pressed his heel on it, but there was no response ; the mechanism was jammed.

"Voyez," the tall man cried. "Elle ne veut pas donner l'ouvrier une petite cigarette."

"Damn it," Clay said. "I'll have to crank it. — Sit tight, Hilda, there'll be a gendarme along any minute."

She stood up while he raised the seat to take the crank from the compartment beneath it, and she felt conspicuous and afraid looking down on the up-turned faces. She heard the shrewish voice saying : "Elle ne donnera même pas une cigarette. Demandez encore, Pierre."

Clay got out of the car and surprisingly the crowd made way for him. He bent over, inserting the crank, and the tall man put one elbow on the edge of the door, his black moustaches near to Hilda's face. "Elle fume des bonnes cigarettes. Elles sont chères, Madame ? Combien la boîte ? Dix francs ? Vingt francs ?"

"Vingt francs !" the woman cried. "Écoutez, elle fume des cigarettes à vingt francs la boîte. C'est incroyable. Vingt francs la boîte, et moi, il me mangue vingt sous pour acheter du pain."

"Tiens," the tall man touched Hilda's arm. "Donnes une cigarette."

Clay was spinning the crank and Hilda moved away from the man with a pretence of adjusting the spark lever. Suddenly Guy stood up ; his voice rang out loud and arrogant : "Get out of here. Allez vous en. Get away, you bastards."

"Guy, shut up," Clay called.

"Qu'est-ce qu'il a dit ? Qu'est-ce qu'il a dit ?" the tall man asked, thrusting out his chin.

The engine sputtered suddenly and as Hilda leaned over and advanced the accelerator it roared, the car quivering. Clay came around to the door and got into the car, holding the crank ready in his lap. Over the noise of the engine Guy was shouting : "Merde, merde. Get out of the way, you French bastards. Idiots. Imbéciles. *Cochons !*" But now Clay had set the car in motion, the crowd was giving way, and there was a clear road ahead as Guy's last word was shouted shrilly. There were immediate angry responses ; something hurtled through the air and struck the gas tank. The car was now moving swiftly and as Clay drove recklessly along the narrow street they heard the last defiant phrase : "La France pour les Français."

They were silent for several minutes. When they had driven far from the scene, when they were at last on the Boulevard de Sébastopol, Hilda said : "The world is getting nasty," and drew a deep, restful sigh. Clay drove to the curb and stopped the car in front of a café. He shut off the engine and, turning to her, put his arm around her and kissed her long and hard. Guy in the back seat said : "For Christ's sake."

"Guy, you've talked enough," Clay said. "Come on, we'll have a drink."

They sat at a table in the brightest light and all three drank brandy, now smiling at each other and talking all at once.

"Hilda, you should have given the man a cigarette," Clay said.

"He made me angry."

"Yes, I know."

"Well," Guy said. "Now you know how the French revolution happened. I can imagine those people gathered with unholy joy around the guillotine."

"We were in their quarter," Clay said. "To them we were rich Americans, and Hilda was smoking twenty franc cigarettes. Maybe that woman really believed they were twenty franc cigarettes, and you heard what she said, that she didn't have twenty sous to buy bread."

"Oh, I should have given him the cigarette," Hilda said. "I know, I'm sorry."

Clay smiled at her, and walking back to the car he put his arm around her waist. They all felt more light-hearted now, back among the lights of the boulevards where Paris was again the Ville Lumière. But as they approached the Opéra there were crowds on the sidewalks, spilling into the streets, and Clay had to drive slowly. Farther along the boulevard, toward the Madeleine, the road was nearly blocked by people. They drove slowly along the Boulevard des Capucines and as they neared the gray Corinthian columns of the Madeleine the movement of the crowd became closer. A traffic policeman in the Place de la Madeleine waved his white baton at them and shook his head as Clay turned left into the Rue Royale. The street ahead of them was a solid black mass of people jamming into the Place de la Concorde.

"We can't go down there," Hilda said. "What do you suppose is going on?"

"Probably the Chamber is still in session. The French take their politics seriously, don't they? Imagine a crowd like that around the Capitol in Washington."

"Let's stop and take a look at it, Clay," Guy said.

Clay drove to the curb, and the crowd gave way slowly. He shut off the motor and they sat a few moments watching the people passing. Men came close to look into the car; a stream of faces passed by. Ahead of them there was shouting, an ominous murmur of voices. They got out of the car and immediately were swept into the press of people, moving along the Rue Royale toward the Place de la Concorde. They were jolted, knocked against each other, crushed suffocatingly together in the crowd, and when they reached a café near the square they turned aside. They saw a solid mass of people in the Place de la Concorde, above it rising the massive figures of the stone women representing the principal cities of France. The tables had been removed from the *terrasse* of the café and they went inside. In the back of the café they found a small service table and one chair. Hilda sat down and Clay stood across from her, calling to a waiter, who merely shook his head and passed on.

Now there was a steady noise from the Place de la Concorde, and many people left their tables and went to the windows, some out to the *terrasse*. Guy stood on tip-toe, shouting for a waiter, holding up three fingers and calling: "Fines à l'eau, trois fines à l'eau."

"There isn't a chance, Guy," Clay said. "Let's go out and see what's happening."

"We'll be trampled underfoot."

"We'll keep our distance. Come on."

There were thirty thousand people in the Place de la Concorde and the pavement was clear only around the fountain at its center and at the tree-lined entrance to the Avenue des Champs-Elysées. Opposite them as they stood at the corner by the stone wall of a bank they could see the Pont de la Concorde and the Palais des Bourbons beyond, where the six hundred deputies then were vot-

ing confidence in the Daladier government, where deputies of the Left were shouting "Soviets, soviets," where in spite of closed windows the noise of the crowd massed in the Place de la Concorde, where the guillotine had stood, was ever present.

"Look, Clay," Hilda pressed his arm. They were on the steps by the bank's doors and they could see above the heads of the crowd ; they could see far across the *place* a quick rush of people among the trees of the Champs-Elysées. They saw a paving block in a swift arc through the air, then a broken branch hurled from the trees : a sudden brief sally of policemen and an abrupt retreat, then a charge of six horsemen, of six of the Garde Républicaine with their casques gleaming in the arc-lights, their black boots shining. It was unreal, as if seen in miniature, as the crowd fell back, as the horses plunged and reared, as men fell under their hoofs.

"There's going to be a riot," Guy said. "Let's get away from here."

"We're safe enough, Guy." Hilda stood on tip-toe. "I want to see it."

Guy did not answer. He stood with his coat collar turned up and his hands deep in his pockets watching two policemen carry a third across the square toward the bridge, the figure a limp scarecrow of blue clothing loosely stuffed. There was a resurgent cry of triumph from the trees of the Champs-Elysées, a hooting, whistling sound.

Now they heard singing, the lifting, rhythmic-punctuated sound of the *Marseillaise*, coming from the Rue de Rivoli on their left, and far away they saw a mass of marching men, of cross-belted youths in bérets. From the Hôtel de Ville the young patriots marched six abreast along the Rue de Rivoli, past the shadowed arcades, through the crowds, toward the Place de la Concorde and the Chambre des Députés, singing the *Marseillaise*, shouting, "à la Chambre." In mass there was strength ; to be one of a number was to multiply and strengthen one's self, to merge one's individuality with a force that carried all before it. Singing *Nous aurons le sublime orgueil de les venger ou de les suivre*, Paul Barthelot's chest swelled out, his voice rose self-

assertive and triumphant. He marched with swinging arms, the black belt tight across his black shirt, his fists clenched. He marched shoulder to shoulder with two young men, swaggering with them, shouting *France for the French*, and the Rue de Rivoli was their avenue of parade, the cock-walk of their youth.

The column had slowed as it neared the Place de la Concorde, as it advanced into the crowd of thirty thousand people, and now there came a clangling sound and the shout of "les pompiers," as in their gleaming brass helmets firemen swarmed from a hose cart and deployed on the Rue de Rivoli. There were shouts and laughter as the water in two stiff streams bore down on the marching men ; spray dashed in their faces. The advancing column fell back, but there was pressure from behind and Paul Barthelot was thrust forward into the force of the hose-stream. He was spun about, knocked choking back upon his comrades, and he twisted away and ran toward the arcades. The League of Patriot Youth broke ranks before the force of the fire hose and found shelter, and a cry of resentment echoed under the coping. Barthelot slipped along the wall, past the brass-helmeted *pompiers*, and thrust himself into the mass of people in the Place de la Concorde, at the corner of the Jardin des Tuileries.

Now the Garde Républicaine was riding into the crowd, steel-shod hoofs ringing on the pavement. The smooth haunches of the horses, with strong muscles gathered beneath, were groomed in checker-board designs. One guard drove his horse forward, forcing men back against the wall of the gardens, and Barthelot was knocked against an iron grille around the base of a tree. He bared his teeth, hissing, ducking away from the horse, then turned as it passed and raised his fist, clutching a knife. He drove the blade deeply, viciously, into the horse's flank and blood spurted scarlet against its dun hide. The horse squealed and reared ; Barthelot saw its eyes glazed and rolling in its head. The horse kicked in terror and he stepped behind a tree. The guard was unseated and fell slowly sideways, his casque toppling from his head, and the riderless horse bounded through the crowd with its head high, its ears flattened. The guard fell to the street and Barthelot surged forward, kicking. He stepped on the plume

of the casque, kicked the metal shell aside. Now the guard was prone in the crowd, crushed underfoot, and with a shout four other guards drove their horses forward. The crowd fell back and Barthelot slipped away, pushing to the left toward the distant Pont de la Concorde and the Chamber of Deputies across the River Seine. Behind him the young patriots were forming ranks again ; again the sound of the *Marseillaise* arose, and Hilda stood on tip-toe on the stone steps to watch.

"They can't get any more people into the square, Clay," she said. "Not possibly."

It seemed that all of Paris was marching ; from the Rue de Rivoli, the Rue Boissy d'Anglas, the Avenue Gabriel, and the Champs-Elysées, the people flowed through the city's arterial streets into the Place de la Concorde, its turbulent, revolutionary heart. Fascists of the Croix de Feu approached on the Quai de la Conférence and Royalists from the student quarter marched from the Quai des Tuileries ; the massed organizations of reaction led the planned convergence on the Parliament of the Republic.

In the light of a small gas flare Jean Barthelot was closing up his kiosk, with his head turned to see the mass of people in the Place de la Concorde. Under the trees a hundred feet away the Garde Républicaine again was charging, but now the crowd was too great to be dispersed. Stones, scraps of iron grating, pieces of asphalt repelled the mounted guards, and they fell back to the bridgehead before the mass advance. Some of the horses limped, lamed by marbles which had been scattered on the pavement under their hoofs. Still men streamed into the square. From his kiosk Jean Barthelot could see along the Rue de Rivoli. Far across the *place* an autobus had been overturned and set afire ; by the light of the flames he saw the massed form of the crowds, saw the illuminated bridgehead where the police stood, where the Garde Républicaine was drawn up like a regiment of cavalry ready to charge into the battle. On the quay across the bridge, fire apparatus waited, and *pompiers* were on the bridge behind the ranks of the police, behind motor lorries which had been lined up to block the bridge.

Through the crowd moved a compact wedge of shouting young

men. The light fell grayly on their faces as they burst in under the trees, surrounding the kiosk. Jean cried a protest, but they threw themselves against the round wooden tower. It shivered, and the zouave in the cigarette poster at its top swayed forward. Jean seized his crutches, screaming, cursing at the intent faces lit by the flickering gaslight in the kiosk. He moved away just before the kiosk fell with a splintering crash to the pavement. He was knocked down in the crowd, groped for his crutches, then he saw them clearly in the sudden bright flare from the broken gaspipe. He was pushed along with the crowd, away from the kiosk, which now suddenly burst into flames that crackled up through the bare limbs of the trees overhead. Sweat was on his face and his armpits were sore and wrenched as he struggled on his crutches. Then in the crowd he saw his brother's face, red and with a strange transfixated look as he watched the burning kiosk.

"Paul!" Jean shouted. He saw his brother's eyes turn, searching in the crowd. He recognized Jean, looked from him to the kiosk, and shrugged his shoulders. Then Jean was borne away in the mob.

Now there came a shout of *à la Chambre*, and the people surged forward, converging on the graceful stone arch of the bridge. Jean Barthelot was swept along, swinging forward on his crutches. *À la Chambre*, his brother Paul was shouting in the crowd. The shouts gave direction to the rioters.

The police were formed at the bridgehead and in front of them the firemen made ready. From across the square Clay saw the gleam of light on their brass helmets, on the brass nozzles of the hose. The police had formed a triple line of blue at the bridgehead, the swift-moving Seine behind them, the six hundred Deputies behind them in the palace of the Bourbons, the government of France behind them as they faced the people of Paris with their clubs in hand, their pistols loosened in their holsters.

À la Chambre a man beside Jean Barthelot shouted, and his hand was on Barthelot's shoulder, pushing him forward. Now for an instant he was alone, stumbling on his crutches ahead of the crowd, seeking to go at a tangent toward the trees.

The stream of water from a hose struck his body with its full charge and he fell backwards to the pavement, his crutches flying. An angry mutter rose from the crowd as the streams of water soared like a holiday demonstration, the drops of spray prismatic in the arc-lights. Choking from the water, Barthelot was helped to his feet ; his crutches were restored to him.

Now there was a quick rush past him ; he could not escape. A brass helmet rolled on the pavement and a fire hose leaped crazily, the nozzle beating on the stone, the burst of water drenching the scuffling men who had attacked the *pompiers*. Then men seized the hose, swung it about, and turned the water on the solid ranks of the police. It splashed into the River Seine and a police officer waved one hand, shouting : "Stop or we fire." The water was turned off at the hydrant and the hoses went limp and a man cried shrilly : "Into the river with the police."

Off under the trees to the south there was the sound of a shot. The police officer called an order and the metal of pistols shone in the bridge lights. Arms were raised and as men shouted again *à la Chambre* there came the sudden brisk scattering of pistol shots. But no one had fallen in the volley ; only for an instant was there hesitation, then an excited voice exclaimed : "Blanks. Their guns are loaded with blanks." A man beside Jean, wearing a teamster's apron, waved his cap and shouted "*à la Chambre*." The movement was forward again, sweeping Jean with it. He tried to break clear, but a man seized his arms. "In front with you, cripple. You march in front, you hear." The shouts rose deep and menacing around him as men ran forward. The line of police stiffened. Again arms were raised and the line of pistols gleamed in the arc-lights. The muscles of Jean's chest were strained taut as he was shoved forward on his crutches ahead of the crowd, toward the line of levelled guns. A fearful rage seized him and he wrenched his shoulders free and swung one crutch clear. He whirled around, swinging it, just as another volley rang out and echoed back from the Palais Bourbon. Barthelot's hands slipped from the rungs of his crutches and he leaned forward. For a moment his body was propped upright by the one crutch, then he fell forward on his face and

blood poured out on the pavement from the wound on his head. The crutches fell beside his body and his blood stained the pavement of the Place de la Concorde where so much blood had flowed.

Six men had fallen. From the steps across the square Clay saw the bodies motionless on the pavement at the bridgehead. He saw the crowd fall back and heard a woman's shrill voice from far away clearly shouting "Assassins, assassins." Now the Garde Républicaine was charging. Sabers were drawn and the horses went crashing into the crowd. Men were knocked aside, sent flying to the cobbles, and now the people were running from the bridge, stampeding across the square toward the Champs-Elysées, toward the Rue de Rivoli and the Rue Royale.

As the guards rode toward them Clay caught Hilda's arm, drawing her away from the wall into the mob. They stumbled around the corner, running now wildly with the rest along the Rue Royale. Behind them the hoofs of the horses rang on the pavement ; there were shouts, cries of pain, and the noise of running feet on the streets was like the drumming of a stampeding herd on sun-baked earth.

"Where's Guy ?" Clay shouted as they ran, as they dodged into the café where they had been before, bursting in through the doors. A waiter pushed them aside, motioning them away from the entrance, and they moved back to the wall as two men entered carrying a third, an unconscious man with his head bloody and his hair wet with thick blood and matted.

"Oh God," Hilda said. Her face was white and her gray eyes glistened. "Clay, is he dead ?"

"I don't think so."

"Clay, I'm going to be sick."

"I'll try to get you a drink."

"I'm going to be sick right here. Where's the ladies' room, Clay ?"

"Upstairs, I think." He took her arm and they went to the red-carpeted stairs at the back of the café and up them to the second floor. Hilda ran ahead of him and Clay went to a window to look out at the street where there were people running,

where mounted guards were riding with drawn sabers, where there was blood on the pavement. He searched for Guy's face down below. By the Tuileries Gardens a group of men wrenched at the railing, tearing it apart for weapons ; he saw a street lamp smashed ; along the Rue de Rivoli many lights had gone out and the night crept stealthily around the Place de la Concorde, making it a glowing stage for the swift massing of men upon it.

Hilda joined him at the window, pale and with a fresh smear of lipstick crimson on her lips.

"How do you feel ?"

"Better now. What's happening, Clay ?"

"Everything. They're fighting all over the Place de la Concorde." Clay understood nothing but his indignation. "They're killing people out there, Hilda."

"Up here you wouldn't know that anything had happened. Let's *do* have that drink, Clay."

They went downstairs and came suddenly into a scene of confusion. Tables had been placed together and men were lying on them. Blood stood in rounded drops on the marble and a man in his shirt sleeves with the calm detachment of a surgeon was bandaging the head of an old man who wore a frayed blue scarf wrapped around his neck.

"Mademoiselle, Monsieur." The *gérant*, frock-coated and red-faced, beckoned to them. "Does Mademoiselle know how to bandage ?"

"I ?" Hilda said. "I . . ."

"We need your help, Mademoiselle, and you, Monsieur."

"Certainly." Clay took off his coat. "Hilda, if you don't feel that you can . . . If you feel sick —"

"I'm all right now."

He hung their coats in a corner and they moved among the tables, following directions, bringing basins of hot water, unrolling bandages and cutting them to length. Blood was on their hands and stained their clothing. Hilda's tailored gray suit was smeared darkly as they worked under the lights at the unreal task, unreal because the pain and suffering was not per-

ceived acutely, because as the minutes went by torn human flesh was only bleeding matter to be sponged and bandaged. At one time there were fifty injured men in the *café*, and as they went from table to table there was no time to think of the wild night in the Place de la Concorde. There was one man whose head had been beaten ; it was swollen and puffy and the hair seemed pounded into the tissue of his flesh. He sat in a chair, moaning through shapeless lips, his hands clenched as the doctor washed his wounds. Clay stood by, a basin of water in his hands, looking at the blood glaring bright in the electric lights, at the tortured living flesh and the eyes so startlingly blue and expressionless. The doctor stitched the wounds deftly, wrapped bandages around the man's head and then signalled to a waiter, calling for coffee. The cashier by the door, a blonde woman with anemic complexion and soft white hands, sat watching with her mouth open a little, fascinated as a child. The man's hand trembled as he raised the glass of coffee, and he rested his elbow on the table to steady it, lowering his swollen lips. His eyes were closed as he sipped the scalding coffee, the strong chickory-flavored black coffee of Paris. He breathed easier now, with his eyes closed, his senses turning from the pain to the soothing heat-taste of the coffee. He was like a woman relieved a moment of labor, in brief and blessed relaxation, numbed so that the major sensation was that of cessation and relief. The blonde cashier watched him as one who gives a saucer of milk to a starved stray kitten, watched him until he had drunk the last of the coffee and with a deep sigh had pushed himself to his feet, steadying himself with one hand on the table. He went toward the door, his feet dragging, and the cashier watched him. It was when his hand was on the polished brass knob that her voice rose, harsh and metallic above the murmurous noise in the *café* : "Monsieur, Monsieur !"

The man turned his huge, bandaged head, his blue eyes dull.

"Monsieur, vous avez oublié payer votre *café*."

"Pardon, Madame, pardon. Combien pour le *café* ?"

"Deux francs, Monsieur."

"Deux francs, oui." His hand fumbled in the pocket of his

coat and he drew out a handful of change. He put a bronze two franc piece in front of her and went out into the street which now was almost normally quiet. He turned back toward the Place de la Concorde and the subway station there, at the corner by the Jardin des Tuileries.

Clay looked at Hilda. She was standing near the doctor, half across the café from him, and the smear of her red lips was brilliant against her white face. Her eyes were green-shadowed. She was facing him, looking toward him, but he knew that she did not see him. Clay went to her over the floor now slippery and wet where a waiter had mopped up the blood ; he hurried toward her, seeing the fixed glazed stare of her eyes, calling : "Hilda." Her face was very white and now he saw that her eyes were blue-circled, her face was gaunt.

"Hilda, are you all right ?"

She turned her head and her eyes came to focus. "I'm so tired, Clay." Her voice was a whisper. "I feel exhausted. — I'm numb all over."

"For heaven's sake sit down and rest." He took her hand and led her away to the corner where chairs were stacked and drew one out for her. "I haven't taken care of you as I should, darling. I'm going to take you home at once." He hesitated, seeing her lustreless eyes, not wanting to let her know how her bloodless face, her pale lips and vacant eyes, alarmed him. He sat down beside her and her head fell against his shoulder, her thick blonde hair against his cheek. Her body relaxed and he felt her limp against him.

"What's the matter ? — Hilda." He put his hand under her chin and raised her head. He briefly glimpsed a gleam of eyeball as her eyes closed and her head rolled sideways on his palm.

The doctor was sitting on a table across the room, smoking a cigarette, and when Clay called to him he raised his eyebrows and walked slowly toward them.

"I think she's fainted," Clay said.

"Attention," the doctor spat his cigarette to the floor and bent

over her. He slapped her cheek, turned up her eyelids with his thumbs. "Ah, she has worked too hard. There's been too much blood for her."

He motioned to Clay and together they carried her to one of the tables. She lay with her feet raised, the light overhead falling full on her pale oval face, outlining the wide round curves of her cheekbones. The doctor sprinkled a few drops of ammonia on his handkerchief and moved it back and forth across her nostrils and a moment later she opened her eyes. Clay held her hand. The doctor called for a glass of water and put a half a teaspoonful of aromatic spirits of ammonia in it. Clay supported her upright while she drank it, and then she sighed and with a wan smile said: "Clay, light me a cigarette."

"You'd better take Madame home now, while the streets are somewhat quiet," the doctor said.

"Yes, we're going. — Hilda, do you think you could walk to the car now?"

"Of course I can. It's very eighteenth century of me to faint so often, Clay. Can you stand drooping females?"

"You need rest," he said, holding both her hands. "I should have realized that. Listen, I'm going to take you away from Paris." He got her coat and they went together into the night air, strangely warm for February. Off to the right there was noise again in the Place de la Concorde and they saw crowds moving across the open; on the Rue Royale there were many people going toward the square so that they walked against the movement of the throng. They walked in the street, near together. There was no traffic and as they neared the Madeleine they saw that there were only one or two cars besides Clay's parked on the Rue Royale.

Hilda sank with a sigh on the cushioned seat and Clay turned on the dashboard light. Suddenly they heard singing from the boulevard behind them and a parading column neared the corner. They heard laughter and shouting and the crash of bursting glass as a store window was broken open.

"Let's get started," Hilda said. "Clay, I want to go home and rest. I want to sleep forever."

Clay stepped on the starter and as the engine turned over he switched on the headlights of the car. A moment later there was a rush of feet and like night insects at a street lamp a group of men flashed into the arc of the lights, young men with mufflers wound around their necks beneath their coats, young men with caps and some with weapons in their hands, sticks and scraps of iron and pieces of railing. Suddenly the car was surrounded with faces and one man shouted : "They're English. Make them pay a ransom."

"Yes, fifty francs. Pay us fifty francs."

"No, a hundred francs."

"A thousand, I tell you. A thousand francs or we'll burn the car. Do you hear, Monsieur ? Do you hear, Englishman ? Pay us a thousand francs or we'll burn your car."

Clay sounded the horn, and immediately there was a shout of anger. "Oh no, Englishman. Stay where you are."

"Pay your ransom. A thousand francs is cheap for your car, Englishman," a yellow-skinned youth in beret cried, leaning into the car, his face close to Hilda's.

"Give them something, Clay."

"I haven't got a thousand francs."

"But give them *something*."

"Listen," Clay shouted. "I haven't any money. Do you hear ? I haven't got a thousand francs."

"Then out of the car. Get out. Into the street, Englishman." The yellow-skinned man opened the door and caught Hilda's arm.

"Burn it," someone shouted. "Set it afire."

"Get out, Hilda," Clay said. "Stay close to me."

Already the car was shaking ; there were many hands upon it. Clay held her elbow, following her to the runningboard, down to the sidewalk in the midst of the crowd, and at once they were shoved aside, backwards toward the wall of the building. Men swarmed over the car. There were shouts and grunts and the creak of metal and wood as the car was lifted. Then it toppled over with a crash of splintering glass as the windshield struck the pavement. They smelled the penetrant odor of gasoline

pouring out on the street, and all at once there was a thin film of flame and then a burst of fire.

“Clay, come away. Don’t say anything, please.”

“Don’t say anything !” Clay cried. “That’s my car.”

“It’s done now. Don’t get into trouble. Come on, let’s walk back toward the Opéra.”

The flames rose from the overturned automobile with a hissing sound and the light flickered on the façades of the buildings opposite. There was a great crowd in the Rue Royale and the Place de la Madeleine, and they heard the eerie noise of shouting. Around the burning automobile the young men were capering.

Now the city of Paris belonged to the rioters. They paraded through the streets. They broke windows and looted stores. They sang and shouted ; and in the Place de la Concorde, on the Champs-Elysées, they fought bitterly, furiously, against the police, the Garde Républicaine and the hated Garde Mobile. Street lights were broken and buses were overturned and as Clay and Hilda walked toward the Left Bank the flaming torch of a broken *bec de gaz* spread a garish light in the streets.

As Clay and Hilda forced their way through the crowd along the Avenue de l’Opéra toward the Louvre, across the Rue de Rivoli and into the Place du Carrousel, Guy Hart marched with the paraders along the Boulevard Haussmann into the Rue de la Boëtie. For an hour he had sat drinking in a café, and now, restless and eager, he listened to the shouting and the songs. In the café he had asked a waiter : “What’s the matter ? What’s happening in Paris ?”

“It seems, Monsieur, there is a revolution.”

“If there’s a revolution, why are you working as usual ?”

“I have a family to feed, Monsieur. — Another fine à l’eau ?”

That had made Guy laugh, and now he was light-hearted as he walked with the paraders, laughing still, participating in the mass movement, absorbing its virility and vigor, swept with it into the Avenue Victor Emanuel toward the Rond Point, the circular park on the Champs-Elysées midway between the Place de la Concorde and Napoleon’s Arc de Triomphe at the Place de l’Etoile. And approaching the Rond Point the pressure of the

crowd was forced back upon him as water from a dam and he pushed his way onward through it, elbowing toward the open. And then, slipping among milling groups, he came suddenly to a place where men were running, where helmeted horsemen were charging with drawn sabers, where steel rang on pavement as horses galloped, where there was swift motion lit by the flare of a burning kiosk, of a gaspipe that normally supplied the news vendor with light and heat but now was broken and sent a thin column of fire into the winter night.

Their ranks twice broken by the charge of the mounted guards, the war veterans were forming again there on the Champs-Elysées ; they were building a barricade of cobblestones and chunks of broken marble railing and park benches. With them worked Paul Barthelot, in the beret and leather belt of the League of Patriot Youth, saying to a stocky veteran with gray hair : "My brother fought for France in the war."

"What division, my friend ?"

"He fought at the battle of the Marne. He fought in the mud at the Somme."

There had been a carnival in an open space just off the Champs-Elysées and the merry-go-round, covered with canvas, still stood there. The buff-colored canvas was ripped away and Barthelot ran with the others toward the merry-go-round. He and the stocky veteran seized a dappled wooden horse and wrenched at it.

"He was killed," Paul said.

"Your brother ? Where, at the Somme ?"

"No. He was killed tonight."

The gray-haired man straightened, one hand gripped on the flowing yellow mane of the wooden horse.

"They shot him in the Place de la Concorde," Paul said. He was shouting in the noise and spittle dripped from the corners of his mouth. "I saw him fall. He was the first to die."

"They will hear of this !" The stocky veteran threw his weight against the horse, twisting it, and between them they wrenched it free, splintering the wood of its spotted gray side.

"It was a good thing," Paul shouted, holding the wooden horse against his chest. "He was a Communist."

The war veteran stared at Paul's small bright eyes, his flushed face and wet lips. "Jesus, man, are you mad?"

"He was an enemy of France," Paul cried. "Down with the enemies of France. France for the French."

"France for the French," a man at his elbow shouted, and someone else took up the cry. They ran forward into the street, Paul and the gray-haired man carrying the wooden horse, and they put it on top of the barricade. The flaring light from the burning kiosk shone on the varnished sides of the dappled gray horse.

The helmeted guards charged again out of the trees, up to the barricade, and Paul ran off to the left. He dashed into the crowd and his solid body struck Guy Hart, knocking him against a tree. Guy kicked out angrily, lost his balance, and fell. Lying on his back beside a tree he looked up into Barthelot's face, in shadow, with the small eyes dimly reflecting light.

"Ah, Américain, what are you doing here? What do you want here in Paris?" Paul thrust the tip of one shoe into Guy's ribs.

Guy got to his feet, backing away as he did so, and Barthelot followed him with short quick steps. Guy was against the tree when the Frenchman struck him, hard, on the shoulder. He turned his head, his hands held out before him, and Barthelot hit his jaw a smashing blow. As Guy fell the Frenchman kicked him, and he kicked him again as he lay on the hard ground at the base of the tree. Then the guards charged again and a horse came crashing in among the trees. Barthelot turned and ran back toward the barricades.

For a long time Guy lay by the tree, while the crowd passed by him, while the mounted guards fought with the veterans of the war in the street. He became conscious and lay listening to the shouts and the sound of galloping hoofs, aware that there was severe pain in his jaw, that a tooth ached stabbingly. All he could think of as he lay there was the ache in his tooth and he remembered that he had a pint bottle of brandy in his pocket. He sat up, resting his back against the tree, and felt in the pocket of his overcoat for the bottle. His face was wet and he touched

it with his fingers. There was a jolt of pain and he closed his eyes. When he opened them he looked at his hand and saw that his palm was wet with blood. He uncorked the bottle and raised it to his lips and held some of the brandy in his mouth before swallowing it. Then he took several long gulps of the brandy and drew himself to his feet with the bottle in his hand. Now he knew that he was hurt ; he knew that his jaw was broken. It was not a tooth-ache. He was hurt and needed attention ; he wandered off among the trees. A man knocked against him and Guy bent over, doubled up with the pain in his jaw. Blood flooded his mouth and he spat with his tongue, holding his jaws rigid, then drank some more brandy. He staggered on again, toward the Place de la Concorde, walking across the park toward the northern corner by the Hotel Crillon, and hardly aware of the noise of thousands of people in the square.

And as he stumbled on from tree to tree the mob surged again toward the bridgehead, where the police and the mounted guards were waiting, where now a battalion of colonial infantry was drawn up, where red-cloaked Moroccan spahis sat their horses. He came to the corner of the Place de la Concorde and the Avenue Gabriel just at the crisis, as thousands charged on the bridge, as shots again rang out over the great open space, echoing from the river. Then the spahis on swift desert horses galloped into the Place de la Concorde. With drawn sabers they charged upon the crowd and their high barbaric shouts carried across the square. Men went down before their horses and after them came the Garde Républicaine and the police, and the crowd in a solid mass fled back across the *place* toward the Rue Royale and the Rue Boissy d'Anglas, toward the Ministère de la Marine, now in flames, and toward Guy as he staggered into the Metro station. He was caught in the press of people and blood spurted from his lips. He was forced with them down the steps to the subway, with the spahis in pursuit, driving the crowd into the subway to bottle it up. He was carried with the crowd down onto the platform and with it into a subway car and he was pressed into a corner. He was sobbing and his blood was diluted with tears and streamed down his chin.

The train drew out of the station and he heard the sound of shooting die away, then he was aware only of the swaying of the car which threw the weight of a man standing behind him against him and crushed his broken jaw against his arm. The train went under the river and passed without stopping the station by the Chambre des Députés. Guy swayed against the wall, sobbing into the angle of his arm, as the train stopped at four stations, and then he heard a voice call *Gare Montparnasse* and raised his head. He went belatedly to the doors, just squeezing through, and walked unsteadily to the stairs and up to the Place de Rennes. Now he was on familiar ground, and as he walked up the Boulevard du Montparnasse he looked for a familiar face. He wanted someone to help him, to ease his pain and tell him what to do, to take him to a doctor. He needed attention and he wanted to be comforted and put to bed for a long time. But the Boulevard du Montparnasse was nearly deserted. He passed an *agent de police* who gave him a second quick glance as he passed under an arc-light, and then on the corner of the Rue du Montparnasse a girl in a green hat looked at him and shuffled her feet on the pavement. She walked ahead of him a few quick steps, making a noise with her high heels in the universal manner of prostitutes, then slowed and looked back over her shoulder. She had a sharp nose and wide green eyes in a very white face and she seemed eager, anxious. She too seemed to need someone and Guy whispered through his swollen lips : "Bon soir, Mademoiselle."

"Bon soir, Monsieur. Vous voulez venir avec moi ?"

Guy nodded his head, and at once she slipped one hand through his arm. He leaned against her, walking with her across the boulevard. They turned down the Rue Vavin.

"Ici, Monsieur." She went ahead of him up the steps of a small hotel and he followed her into the lobby, where he found her waiting for him because of his slowness. She looked at him with her head on one side, her brilliant lips a little parted in her chalk-white face.

"Monsieur, what's the matter with you ?"

"Nothing. I'm all right."

She took his arm then with both hands, saying : "Upstairs I will wash your face for you. Did you fall down ?"

"Yes, I fell down. I'm hurt."

They climbed the stairs together, and the pressure of her hands on his arm kept him from losing his balance and tumbling backwards down the staircase. On the first floor they turned down a silent, carpeted corridor and the girl stopped in front of a door, smiling at him as she felt in her handbag for a key. She opened the door and went in ahead of him, turning on a shaded light. Guy shut the door and leaned against it, looking at the dark curtains opposite, at the dark red cover on the bed, at the washstand and the *bidet* in the corner. The room smelt close ; the air in it was oppressive and he drew a deep breath.

The girl had taken off her hat, and now with a lithe wriggle of her hips she slipped off her dress and turned toward him, thin and white in her underwear.

"Come here," she said. "Don't you want to wash your face ?"

"No," Guy said. He took out his pocketbook and opened it. When she saw the fifty franc note in his hand she came to him and took it, smiling, then waited, glancing up at him with her eyes nearly closed, her eyelids languorously lowered. Now the pain returned through the numbness of his jaw and in the small room Guy felt afraid. He wanted to bolt from his fright out of the room, knowing that he must find a doctor at once. He put his hand on the brass knob.

"But what's the matter ? Aren't you going to stay ?"

"No." He opened the door.

"But why ? You don't like me ? Don't you think I'm pretty ?"

Guy staggered out into the hall and she looked down, with her arms spread, at her thin body, at her stockings with runs at the knees, at the cheap underwear that fell stiffly from her hips. She looked at the closing door and then again at her thin, pear-shaped breasts, and suddenly Arlette threw herself on the bed and wept bitterly, with her face buried in the pillow.

A Day of Civil War — A Night of Riot, the newspaper headline said, and Clay read the statement of Premier Daladier that there had been *a real armed attack on the security of the state*. Hilda still was asleep on the balcony above and in the morning light she seemed paler than she had the night before. She slept in exhaustion, with her legs and arms thrown out, her cheek deep in the pillow, and he did not awaken her. That morning he had left her sleeping and had gone to the corner for a newspaper. In the morning sunlight Paris seemed calm again. Still there were no taxicabs and very little traffic, but the life of the city seemed far removed from the events of the night before, from the rioting and the shooting in the Place de la Concorde.

Madame Bernard was in the areaway, talking to a postman ; she called to Clay : "Monsieur 'All, have you read what happened last night ?"

"Yes, I saw it. I was there."

"You were in the Place de la Concorde, do you mean, Monsieur ?"

"Yes. — My car was overturned and burned, Madame. They wanted us to pay a ransom."

"Formidable !" Madame Bernard made a noise with her tongue against her teeth. "You were lucky to escape with your life, Monsieur. It was the Royalists who caused it, they say."

"The Royalists ? Oh, no." The *patronne* of the wine shop next door put her head out the window. "It was the Garde Mobile, Madame Bernard."

"The Communists began it, I was told," the postman said, with a shake of his head.

Clay left them talking and returned to the studio. As he opened the door Hilda called to him : "Clay, is that you ? What time is it ?"

"About noon. How do you feel ?" He went up the stairs, and found her lying limp as a rag doll on the bed.

"I'm still tired. Clay, I've been awake. I've been lying here thinking. It just doesn't make sense, does it ? Every-

thing is turned inside out. I'll never forget those people being shot down. I'll never forget the blood."

"You should read the papers." He sat down beside her. "Listen to what the *Paris Soir* says : 'The dead will not rise again. To the just indignation of citizens made heartsick by the immorality of certain of their representatives answers cannot be given by rifles, tanks and machine guns.' — Ten people were killed last night, and five hundred wounded, Hilda."

"Clay, doesn't it make you feel lost? — Oh, I want to go away." She sat up in bed, sighing. "Let's go where there's peace, Clay."

"We'll go away." He reached for her hand. "Listen, I think I'll marry you and take you away somewhere." He leaned nearer her. "How about it?"

"Do you mean it?"

"It's a proposal, all right. — Do you want to, Hilda?"

"If you do." She looked up at him. "I guess we've seen enough of each other to know whether we want to spend the rest of our lives together. I think I do."

"I know I do," Clay said. "Right away?"

"Why not?"

"Then let's do it. We can be married and go back to America. Do you want to go back, Hilda? Maybe we'll find peace there, and maybe we won't. The lines are tightening all over the world. — We can go back to America, but we'll see blood flow in the streets again — and, Hilda, we won't be spectators next time."

As they were having breakfast at the café on the corner of the Rue de Vanves they read the newspaper stories of the riots. Now Premier Daladier had resigned and Gaston Doumergue was to be recalled to form a cabinet. The delegates of the Paris Municipality after a meeting had issued a statement : *Citizens : Following the frightful day of February 6, which will remain as a tragic date in the history of Paris, we have thought it our duty to express to the President of the Republic at Elysée Palace the emotion and indignation of the people of Paris. Too much blood has already been shed.* Parades and street meetings had been

forbidden. Clay suggested that Alice Rand might recommend an American lawyer, and they walked from the Rue d'Alésia to her small hotel on the Rue Campagne Premier.

Her windows opened on a balcony with a view of the Cemetery of Montparnasse, and they were opened that afternoon to let in the pale sunlight and the moist February air. Roger Baron was seated in a chair by the window and Alice was on the bed, her pale face in shadow, but she jumped to her feet when they entered.

"Clay, have you heard about Guy Hart?"

"No. What?"

"He was half-killed in the riots. — We were in the Dôme late and he staggered in, covered with blood, and we took him to the hospital. His jaw was broken."

"Poor Guy," Hilda said.

"Maybe that will knock some sense into him," Alice said. "It's a mean thing to say, but maybe it will." She was excited. Her eyes were bright and her widow's peak moved up and down as she talked. "Clay, did you ever see such a night? Didn't we tell you there would be trouble?"

"We were in the Place de la Concorde," Clay said.

"Were you?" Alice was envious.

"Eet was a terrible theeng," Roger said, turning his face from the window. "Eet was a coup d'état, Clye, and almost it succeeded."

"Well, I suppose I'm in favor of the workingman," Clay said. "But those bastards burned my automobile. They demanded ransom and when we didn't pay they upset the car and fired it."

"Do not blame eet on the working class, Clye. Last night eet was the fascists who tried to seize the government. It was a planned attack, Clye, from all sides on the Chambre des Députés. They were united — the Croix de Feu, the Young Patriots, the Solidarité Française, the Fédération des Contribuables — in a fascist front for the first time in France. I tell you, thees ees a very dangerous crisis. They have made l'affaire Stavisky and the unrest of the nation the excuse to lead an attack upon the State. They take advantage of the discontent of the people and mislead them. But you saw eet. You saw the Croix de Feu,

did you not? You heard them shouting 'France for the French,' did you not? Last night, Clye, was the first beeg movement of fascism in France. And the newspapers — ah, have you seen the newspapers?"

"Yes, some of them."

"They scream their indignation against the government, do you see? That is their smoke screen, to make the people hate parliamentary government and accept the nationalist government of fascism. They say nothing of the Croix de Feu, of the fascists leading the attack. They take advantage of the popular indignation. They protest." Roger stood up, touching Clay's shoulder with one large hand. "No, we have not seen the end of thees crisis, Clye. The propaganda that built thees crisis goes on to build another. But we will stop it. Two days from now, in the Place de la République, Clye, there will be a great demonstration, a front populaire. The working class will unite against fascism. The working class sees the true issue. We will show our strength. In that way we will stop eet. . . ."

"At first I thought it was revolution," Clay said.

"Revolution? Yes, but a coup de force by the fascists, my fran'."

"Well, even with France tumbling about our ears, we want to get married," Clay said. "Alice, do you know an American lawyer here?"

"Well, Clay, congratulations. Congratulations, both of you."

Roger very solemnly shook Clay's hand. "But do you know a lawyer, Alice?"

"Sure, a man named Radik. On the Rue St. Augustin."

"How about it, will you and Roger be our witnesses?"

"Of course. Roger, get that bottle by the bidet. — Hilda, a drink for the bride."

They took a bus to the Right Bank. There were soldiers on guard at the public buildings, dragoons and cuirassiers, and still there was a nervous air of restraint about the city. They went to the Rue St. Augustin, and took the elevator to the lawyer's offices on the third floor.

As soon as they explained that they wanted to be married Mr.

Radik assumed a special manner, a veneer of benevolence that instead of disguising his conjecture as to how large a fee he could charge actually made him appear more coldly calculating, more professionally paternal. Clay and Hilda sat across the desk from him and he leaned back in a swivel chair, smiling, with the tips of his fingers pressed together. He was a short man and his feet swung clear of the floor as he leaned back in the chair. His hands were small, with thick fingers, on one of which was a signet ring. His moustache was a close mass of bristles and his hair was erect in sandy bristles above his low forehead.

"So you want to get married," he said. "Vell, here in France that is not so easy, not so 'yes, I do, that's all,' like America. Perhaps that is why so many Americans here in Paris do not go to the trouble, don't you think? Ha. Ha — Now, Mr. Hall, where do you live?"

"On the Rue d'Alésia. The fourteenth arrondissement."

"Yes, and where does Mademoiselle live?"

"The same address," Clay said.

"Ah? Ha. Ha. Vell, maybe I vas right, no?" He looked at Hilda with his eyebrows raised in awakened interest. "So, you are both Americans from the Stets. Which is your Stet, Mademoiselle?"

"New Hampshire."

"And Mr. Hall."

"Texas."

"Texas? Vell, you are a long vays from home, young man. Now I tell you, it is not easy to get married in France, and for you it takes a long time."

"About how long?" Clay asked.

"About a month, maybe."

"A month!" Hilda said.

"I understood it required less than two weeks," Clay said.

"Not for you, young man. In Texas there is a law that you must post the banns for three days. So, you see, we must send to Texas and post the banns, and then we must post the banns here again after that for ten days. You see now how it takes time."

Clay looked at Hilda, and Mr. Radik, seeing in their faces a mutual hesitation, said quickly : "But vait, vait. Why do you think I am a lawyer, young man ? It takes a month, but I can fix it quicker than that. It takes a little money, a little red tape, you understand, but I know how to go about that. I'm a lawyer, young man, that's why you come to me."

"How much does it cost, then ?" Clay asked quietly.

"How much ? Vell, everything, the whole business, you understand, I can fix for, vell, for five t'ousand francs."

"Oh, no," Hilda said. "I don't want to get married *that* badly, Clay."

"That's too much to pay just to go back in the same stateroom on the boat." Clay stood up. "Well, thank you, Mr. Radik."

"But vait a *minute*, young man. I vant to help you. I vas young onct myself, and I like to see young people get married. — Now listen, how much can you pay me ?"

"Not very much," Hilda said.

"I tell you. I give my lowest price. Below that I cannot go and make even a fee for myself. I charge you t'ree t'ousand francs, yes ? T'ree t'ousand francs for everything."

"I suppose we *could* afford twenty-five hundred," Hilda said, and Clay looked at her, frowning.

"Twenty-five hundred ? But, Mademoiselle, that much alone I vill have to pay out to, you know, to fix things up."

"That's all we can afford," Hilda said firmly.

"Twenty-five hundred, no." Mr. Radik looked across at her with his lips pursed. "For twenty-eight hundred I say yes."

"All right," Clay said quickly. "Twenty-eight hundred then."

"I tell you I'm losing money. But I vas young, too, onct, and ven I vas married I vas no older than you, young man. Vell now, I have your names and where you live. Suppose, young man, you meet me at the Mairie of the fourteenth arrondissement at four o'clock this afternoon. You vill sign a little paper there and we vill post the banns. All right ?"

"All right," Clay said.

Going down the stairs Clay said, "That was an unromantic oc-

casion, bargaining for a marriage. You were good at it, Hilda."

"Clay, we had to do it. We haven't much money." She put her hand on his arm. "Listen, don't be angry with me. Someone has to be practical, Clay."

"Oh, all right."

"Now don't be sullen. Clay, there's a lot of sentimental nonsense in your head."

"Sentimental! I'm not sentimental."

"Well, there's a soupçon of the southern aristocrat anyhow. — Money be damned, man, name your price, suh."

Clay laughed, and they walked arm in arm along the boulevard, and at the corner Clay stopped, saying: "We ought to go to the hospital and see Guy. How do you suppose we could get there with no taxis?"

"Clay, do you really believe that taxis are the only means of transport in Paris? We'll take a bus, of course, like ninety-nine per cent of the people do."

"All right, let's ask a gendarme what bus to take."

It was a long ride to the hospital, and then a walk along an avenue of trees. At the reception desk they were told that Guy's condition was not serious and that they could see him. They found him in a room on the third floor, sitting up against three pillows, with the lower part of his face in bandages. He could talk in a whisper and his voice issued from the bandages petulant and irritable.

"Damn it, Clay, they won't let me have a drink."

"You don't take a fractured jaw very seriously, do you? How did it happen, Guy?"

"I think a horse kicked me."

"I knew you'd get into some sort of trouble after we lost you in the crowd. I suppose you insulted someone."

Guy shook his head, his dark eyes watching Clay.

"If you recover in time, Guy, you can be a witness at our wedding," Hilda said.

"Your wedding?" Guy raised his eyebrows and looked at Clay.

"Yes, the end of next week."

"Well!"

"Then maybe we'll go back to America," Clay said.

"Oh."

"I've had enough of France," Hilda said. "I want to go home. Can you imagine not being a foreigner any more? Can you imagine men not rubbing against you on the street? Can you imagine being in a country where you belong again?"

Guy leaned back against the pillows. After a moment he turned his pale face away and his voice came to them low and indistinct: "I'm going away too, as soon as I get out of here."

"Why, you've just come back," Clay said.

"I know, but I think I'll go down to Barcelona for a few months. They say it's cheap to live and there's plenty of life there. France is too damned realistic now. — Maybe I'll come to New York next fall too, Clay."

"You ought to, Guy. We've all been expatriates long enough. Why don't you come back and settle down?"

"I don't much want to settle down," Guy said, and after they had gone he lay looking out the window, his hands lying limp on the counterpane, his whole body relaxed. He felt very tired, and very empty; he felt alone and he drew in a deep breath through the bandages. For long hours he had lain on the hospital bed in the oppressive restraint of the room. Now again was a time of hiatus in his life, a brief pause that forced recollection and appraisal. He lay with his cheek against the pillow, his eyes hot to the point of tears. Now again it seemed that people were receding from him; Clay was finding an interest that he could not. Yes, now he would go to Barcelona and for a few months there would be new faces and new friends and then again a crisis with the string of his life in a tightly-drawn knot, oppressing him, and again he would rush away, back to Paris, or to Vienna, Berlin, Italy, Mexico . . .

Seine. On the Rue Caumartin, the Rue de Sèze, the mobs of Paris fought the helmeted Garde Mobile, the red-cheeked young men from the provinces mustered in an alien corps. From the suburbs, from neighboring towns, Frenchmen rode in holiday mood to see the battlefield, to exclaim over bullet-holes in the trees, to search out the spot where men had fallen dead. But as night came on there were silent men walking in the streets. And when again the order was given to clear the square, when horsemen rode from the bridgehead into the Place de la Concorde, anger flared anew and again the missiles flew from the trees of the Champs-Elysées. And in the night there was shooting and more men died.

In the garden behind the smoke-gray house it was very quiet and Clay and Hilda lay together on the balcony, secure in their peace with each other. They heard the wind in the bare branches of the acacia trees ; they heard dry leaves rustle on the gravel walk like ladies in taffeta dancing in the garden. But they did not hear the shouting and the sound of shots far across Paris in the Place de la Concorde, in the stormy streets between the Madeleine and the Gare Saint Lazare. Late at night there was moonlight and their bed was barred with soft shadows from the balcony railing, and Clay awoke, seeing the moon through the skylight as if reflected in rippled water. He raised himself on one elbow to look at Hilda. In the moonlight the contours of her face were veiled in a dream-like fantasy, the shadows shifted on her cheek in a ghostly caress. Looking at her he remembered her white face as she stood in the bright light of the café with dark stains on her dress, with blood on her frilled white jabot. He remembered her in the Grand Sporting Club suddenly helpless in his arms, and now he put his cheek against hers, gently, to feel her cool skin against his, to calm the anxiety in him with a caress as ethereal as the flutter of an eyelash. He put his hand on one of hers and in her sleep her fingers clung to his like a child's.

They were awakened by a knocking on the door, awakened to a spring morning of clear air and sunlight which brightened the corners of the studio and spun golden dust-skeins in the still air. Clay put on his dressing gown and went down the narrow stair-

case to the door. It was Madame Bernard with a sheaf of letters in her hand, a crooked smile on her face that drove her round brown mole into refuge at the corner of her mouth.

"Ah, Monsieur 'All, many letters for you this morning. Many letters for you and for *Madame*." She accented the last word, with one leering eyebrow raised, with her black eyes glittering.

Clay took the letters and she leaned against the door jamb, rattling a bunch of keys in the pocket of her gray smock. She watched him as he glanced at the letters. On top she had placed a circular from a commercial firm advertising dress suits to hire, *pour les noces*. When he looked up at her she said: "Again they were rioting last night, Monsieur. Have you seen the papers?"

"No."

"So far seventeen have been killed, the papers say." She rolled her eyes at him. "But it was quiet here, wasn't it? *Madame* is still asleep?"

"Yes," Clay said, and shut the door. He turned back into the studio, standing under the skylight.

"Clay, what was it?"

"Letters. — You never saw so many letters." He laughed. "Hilda, do I have to wear a dress suit?"

"What do you mean?"

"At the wedding."

"Have you got one?"

"I can rent one for, let's see, for a hundred and fifty francs — and a silk hat to go with it." He climbed the stairs. "And see here, we can rent a charabanc for the wedding party. Here's a picture of it. Take a look. It has fifty seats."

She was sitting up in bed and he tossed the mail in her lap.

"What in the world is all this?"

"Advertisements, my dear, advertisements of dress suits and top hats and charabancs and salons *pour les noces* and wedding gowns. — You should have seen Madame Bernard's leer. Now you *are* compromised. The entire Quartier Plaisance must know of your shame by now."

"But how did they find out? Where do all these things come from?"

"Yesterday afternoon when I saw Mr. Radik at the Mairie the banns were posted. They stay on a bulletin board for ten days and anyone who passes by can read of our intentions. I suppose they send advertisements to everyone whose banns are posted. Isn't it obscene?"

Hilda sat reading the circulars, laughing over them, saying: "Clay, shall we ride to the Mairie, just the two of us, in a charabanc?"

"Why not? We haven't got a car any more. Do you want orange blossoms too, and a wedding cake?"

"Is a marriage legal otherwise?"

"What do we care whether it's legal. I feel married now."

"So do I."

They both laughed, and Clay sat down on the edge of the bed to look at her. There are moments when impressions are so distinct, so fully perceived, that even at the time it is known that they will never be forgotten, and Clay knew that this was one of these. He would remember her sitting up in bed with the circulars spread before her. And there were many more such impressions in the week that followed. The appearance of a room, of an open door and blue sky beyond, of Hilda in the doorway with sunlight reflected on her face; Hilda nude on the model-stand in the soft even light of the studio; Hilda in a sports suit, without a hat, walking with him in the gray streets of Plaisance, sitting opposite him at *café* tables: these were things that were frozen in his memory.

All that week Madame Bernard brought mail to the *pavillon* in the garden, making a joke of it, saying: "More of these letters for you, Monsieur 'All. The Republic of France will grow rich from postage stamps, don't you think?"

They were nearly oblivious of the events of that exciting week, their personal lives were so far removed. On the night of February ninth the workers of Paris marched into the Place de la République, marched without arms to shouts of "soviet everywhere." In the great square of the working class quarter of

Paris they awaited the police ; they fought back with paving blocks and stones against revolver and rifle fire. Shooting from motor lorries, riding on steel-shod horses into the crowd, the police and the Garde Républicaine again and again attacked the demonstrators and the battle lasted until midnight in the riotous east of Paris ; there were barricades in the streets and broken lamp posts lit the scene with gaseous blue flames. Clay and Hilda read in the newspapers that six had been killed, hundreds arrested, and they listened with sympathy and indignation to Roger Baron's account of it. But they were alien to the strife ; they found shelter in their foreignness. A general strike was called by the French Federation of Labor for the following Monday, but it was orderly and disciplined and no violence was attempted against it. And after the burial of the workers killed in the Place de la République, after the funeral procession had passed through silent streets — in which the merchants had lowered the steel shutters of their shops and stood with bared heads to watch the slow cortège pass on to the Père-Lachaise Cemetery — the life of the city again became normal. Quiet came with the sunshine and the warm air of spring, but daily the workers showed their solidarity in meetings in public halls, in the streets, as the movement of the *front populaire* gathered momentum.

Clay and Hilda lived secluded in the garden, keeping house together, weaving the daily net of their lives together. They did not often leave the studio for long, although one night they went to the Cirque d'Hiver to see the Fratellini, the three aging but peerless clowns of the Paris circus. Generally they avoided crowded places. There was very strongly the impression of going hand in hand together and alone. Hilda bought two steamer chairs and on sunny days they would sit in the garden under the acacia trees, talking idly of casual things, and their conversations would continue as she posed for him in the studio. Once, as she stood on the model stand under the skylight, she said : "Clay, I want to get weighed. Look at me." She turned toward him with her arms spread, the palms of her hands turned out. "Don't I seem very thin ?"

"Not particularly. I like you slender, Hilda."

"But you wouldn't like me if I were skinny, would you?"

"Even a bag of bones," he said lightly. She smiled, but later that afternoon she returned from marketing with pouting mouth and serious gray eyes. "Clay, I've lost six pounds."

"You'll gain them back when this excitement is over. The thing to do is to drink beer. Let's begin now."

They went to a café then. Usually they avoided Montparnasse, preferring to find new cafés for themselves. But when they were with other people Clay found Hilda shy and reserved and he felt in her shyness a dependence on him ; it seemed that she approached the world through him, and more and more sheltered herself in his protection with a compelling femininity.

They worked together at Clay's painting. He was finishing pictures he had begun in the south of France, and she helped him stretch the canvases on the frames and prime them. Once he said : "When I get back to New York I'm going to have a show."

"Clay, when are we going back ? Really, I want to get away from France."

"We'll have to go back soon," he told her then. "I haven't very much money left."

"You haven't, Clay ? What do you mean ?"

"I sold my last bond a little while ago."

"You did ? — I've never thought of money with you, Clay, except for your extravagance. You never seem to think of it. But you aren't really broke ?"

"Just about."

"Then what are we going to do, dear ?"

"Go back to America, of course."

"But then what ?" She touched his arm. "Clay, you *are* irresponsible. It's exasperating. Why didn't you tell me this sooner ?"

"Do you mind very much ?"

"But we've been throwing money away. I didn't know. — Of course I'd rather we had money forever." She laughed. "But since we haven't — well, I'm used to that. But, Clay, what are we going to do ? You've never worked, have you ?"

"No. But I'll sell my pictures, Hilda, when we get back to New York."

She leaned against the wall, glancing at the stack of canvases beside her, after a moment said : "Clay, I've always thought of you as rather masterful, in a way. — Now I see you're completely helpless."

"Helpless ? What nonsense."

"It's true. I'm going to have to take care of you, I can see that. Clay, you should have gone back home last fall instead of wasting away the rest of your money over here."

"It hasn't been wasted."

"But, Clay, listen to me. You've never been without money. What if you don't sell any paintings, what will you do ?"

"Oh, let's hope for the best."

"And let's prepare for the worst, too."

"I'll find some sort of job, if I have to, but people always manage to live." He looked at her with a frown. "And then we can always go back to Texas. My grandfather wants me to come home."

"What would that be like ?"

"Texas ? Why, there's a five thousand acre ranch there, and a house in a grove of pecan trees, and fields of bluebonnets as sentimental as a postcard of the Mediterranean. — And the hills roll away from you like big lavender waves and the grass is up to your knees and blows in the wind like a field of wheat. There are horses to ride and a creek to swim in and the air is so clear — you can't see it like you can in Paris — and in summer it's hot as hell itself, except at night and then in the country you actually do have to sleep under a blanket and the stars are the biggest and brightest you ever saw."

"That sounds all right," Hilda said with her head on one side. "Go on."

"We live in the county seat — it's just a country town and all the houses sit around the courthouse like Indians looking at a campfire. There's an old yellow house that smells of dust and floor polish. That's where we live. The morning paper is

thrown on the lawn early and it's all local news and hardly a line about any other part of the world. There aren't any streetcars or subways or buses and in the late afternoon hot tamale men walk along under the trees yelling "hot, hot," and they come out of a heated tin container, wrapped in corn shucks and juicy as an orange. People sit on the piazzas in the evenings and the kids chase fireflies across the lawns and put them in milk bottles and about ten o'clock everybody goes to bed, unless they've gone downtown to the movies, and then they stop at a drug store afterwards and drink a coca-cola — they have curb service, of course. And there's a little lake, artificial, where they swim in summer, and everyone knows everybody else and his whole life history and the things in a family that are only shadows in the background of the family are the basis of gossip to everyone else." Clay turned away from the easel. "Well, that's Texas, and that's Rutherford. My grandfather just about owns the town."

"But why not go back there, Clay? It sounds wonderful to me."

"Do you think you'd like bridge parties and women's clubs and picnics and swimming parties and church work?"

"No, but I'd like the ranch."

"Yes," Clay said. "I like the ranch." He hesitated. "I don't get along particularly well with my grandfather, Hilda. I ought to tell you about him. In my life he's always been a sort of elemental force, too strong to stand against. He wanted to dictate to me in everything, as he has dictated to everyone else in the family, and frankly I ran away from him — that's why I came to France, and to go back to Texas would be to accept defeat. He would take advantage of it. Sometimes I think I hate that old man."

"Enough not to go back to Texas?"

"I don't know," Clay said. "I'll have to think about it."

Two days later she went to him in the studio, where he was painting a view of a town in Provence from a watercolor he had made a year before, and sat down on the model stand. "Clay."

"Uh-huh. Say, light me a cigarette, will you?"

"I want to talk to you."

"All right. Go ahead."

"Stop painting a minute."

He looked up at her still face, then put the palette on the floor. "Why so serious?"

"It is serious. Clay, we have to arrange for our passage."

"There's time enough for that."

"Now, Clay, you have to face it. Your money will run out pretty soon and there won't be any more. You can be strong and independent with money, Clay. Without it you'll find the world entirely different. Clay, you *do* have to go back."

"Yes, I know it, but there are plenty of pleasant things to talk about. Look, don't you think I have a good start on this?" He put his head on one side, looking with squinted eyes at the painting.

"Clay, this is February the fifteenth, and I'm going to be on a boat by the twentieth, do you hear?"

"*You* are?"

"Yes, I'm going alone."

"But, Hilda —"

"That is, unless you come too."

"Of course I'm going with you. Say, aren't we going to be married? What are you talking about?"

"I still want to marry you, if that's what you mean, darling, but spinster or wife I'm going to be on a boat by the twentieth." He was puffing on a cigarette, not looking at her, and she said: "Clay, I *have* been without money, and it frightens me. There's a depression in this world. We don't notice it so much here, because there weren't many unemployed in France until last spring. But there are twelve million in America."

"Yes, I know all that. — I've thought about it too, Hilda. I've worried about it. But I wanted to hang on to what we have here just as long as possible. Listen, I'm an escapist, I know that, but it's been forced on me from boyhood. Then I was escaping from my grandfather, from domination. I had to run away from there in order to paint, and I've been running ever since. I know that very well."

"But there's no place to run now, is there?"

"There's always Texas." He smiled and put his arm around her. "All right, Hilda, we'll get married and stay here two or three weeks more, and then start back."

"Oh no, Clay. No. We can't put it off any longer."

"Two weeks isn't long." He smiled. "It's our honeymoon."

"We're going at once, Clay, or I'm going without you. I mean it."

"You don't want to leave me, do you?"

"You know what I mean. I never want to leave you, Clay."

"You win," Clay said. "I'll get a paper and look up the sailings. What line do you want to travel on? The fastest boat won't be too swift for me, once we get started."

"Slow boats are cheaper."

"Well, a medium fast boat then."

"Clay," she looked at him closely. "I know what you have in your mind."

"I? What?"

"I'm going to buy the steamship tickets. I mean I'm going to arrange for them. Otherwise — oh, I'm sure of it — Clay, you'd go first class."

"Why not?"

"You idiot, can't you realize we're broke?"

"There's plenty of money in the world, Hilda, and we'll get our hands on some of it. In the mean time, let's spend it while we have it."

"And arrive in New York without a sou?"

"We're not that poverty-stricken." He saw the expression of her eyes and said quickly: "Don't take it so seriously, though. We'll go on a cattleboat if you want to."

"I only want to go in a sensible way. We'll take a one-class boat, Clay, and the cheapest we can find."

"Oh, all right."

"And an inside cabin."

"An inside cabin, then." He nodded.

XVI

"LET'S get up," Clay said. "Don't you remember that this is your wedding day?"

"Oh, can't we postpone it? I'm sleepy." Hilda laughed, then at once sat up and reached for her *negligée*.

"The sun came out for us."

"Yes, isn't it glorious? Isn't Paris a sentimental city? Clay, it feels like spring."

"It's practically March."

"It's a shame to leave Paris without seeing the chestnut blossoms again." Hilda went down the stairs to the studio and Clay followed her, sitting on a trunk that they had locked and strapped the day before.

Clay lit a cigarette and sat with his feet drawn under him on the trunk, looking at the crate in which he had packed his canvases the day before. It had been necessary to go to the American consulate and swear to an invoice of them for the New York customs.

"Hilda," he said. "Do you know that I'm taking over a hundred canvases back to America."

"Clay, get dressed."

"The first thing I'm going to do, the very first thing, is to arrange to have a show. You know, I'm not a bad painter, and I've improved tremendously in the past year. Maybe we have success waiting for us over there."

"Maybe." Hilda was spooning coffee into the drip pan without looking at him.

"Oh, be enthusiastic, Hilda. Put on your rosy glasses just for today."

"And you be practical, Clay. If you set your hopes too high you'll only be very disappointed. The people who want to buy pictures, just to look at, who want to hang them on the wall to live with and appreciate, usually don't have any money to buy them. And you're absolutely unknown."

"I'll *be* known."

"Just now you're going to be married, if only I can persuade you to put on your clothes and come to the church. Now hurry up, Clay, Roger and Alice will be waiting for us."

Clay got down off the trunk and walked dreamily to the wash basin and Hilda with a little sigh went past him to the mirror. Suddenly he turned toward her and said in a quick, sharp voice : "But Hilda, I *am* going to have a show, if it takes our last cent."

"Of course, Clay."

"For the record."

"All right, it's on the record."

As they hurried out to the street Madame Bernard met them in the areaway, smiling at them, saying : "Bon jour, Madame 'All," and leaning on her broom to look after them as they went on toward the street. They walked to the Mairie of the Fourteenth Arrondissement, a square building of gray stone in the center of the Place de Montrouge, a building of dark corridors and creaking floors, and of grimy, echoing rooms. They met Alice and Roger on the steps ; Roger standing with his hands in his pockets and a gentle, sentimental grin on his soft face.

"Clye, you are late. We have been waiting for a quarter of an hour."

"I'm sorry, Roger. — Where do we go, do you know ?"

"Upstairs. — Come on."

Hilda and Alice went ahead of them along a dark corridor, and up a staircase to the second floor. They entered a vast room in which there were many benches, behind a railing, opposite a desk. There was a soft murmur of voices, restrained to whispers. One group was laughing, animated, all self-conscious because in the dingy public room they were dressed for a church wedding, the bride in white with a veil, the groom in a dress suit that was ill-fitted to his heavy shoulders. Alice led the way to the front row and they sat together on a bench, facing the desk. They waited only a minute when a door swung open and a man in dark blue cut-away coat came in carrying a tri-cornered hat with a red cockade. He cried, "Oyez, oyez," and a few words of rapid French, then stood aside and the Maire entered with his head bent and walked directly to the desk. He sat down and began to

read over papers, and the rustle of sound in the room died away into an expectant hush.

The first couple called was the man in the dress suit and the girl in the bridal veil. Amid excited laughter of their friends they all came forward toward the Maire, in a row in front of him. The Maire's voice droned out a few phrases ; there were whispered responses, and suddenly in a burst of merriment the wedding party trouped out the door into the noisy corridor and the room became still again. Then the attendant called : "Monsieur 'All, Mademoiselle Jyme."

Now Clay and Hilda went and stood before the desk and the Maire looked up at them over his spectacles. They heard his voice slurring over the accustomed phrases and when he glanced up, pausing, Clay said, "oui," and a moment later Hilda took the cue for her response. It had taken only a minute, and now the man in the eighteenth-century blue coat smiled and came toward them with his tri-cornered hat held out, saying : "Pour les pauvres de l'arrondissement."

Clay put ten francs in the hat, then the Maire signalled to him, holding out a pen. There was a small yellow-gray book opened on the desk in front of him and Clay signed it, then Hilda. The Maire gave them the book with a little bow and it was all over. They went down the hall with Alice and Roger, and now they were laughing as foolishly as had the wedding party ahead of them.

"I don't believe it's legal," Hilda said. "It's perfectly absurd."

"Imagine waiting ten days just for that," Clay said. On the steps of the Mairie, in the sunlight, he kissed her ; then Roger kissed her and Alice pecked Clay's cheek.

"How about a drink ?" Clay said.

"There's a café on the corner of the Avenue du Maine," Roger said. "Allons-y."

Grouped around the table Hilda opened the *livret de famille*, exclaiming : "Good Lord, they have space here to register twelve children."

"Twelve !" Alice cried. "What busy people you'll be."

"Oh, this can't be legal," Hilda said. "Look at this. Look

— eight pages of type telling how to take care of children. Clay, we're not married, we're just instruments of propagation."

"For the next war," Roger said.

"Listen, it says here that if your baby is — Listen, *Si les paupières de l'enfant sont ou rouges, ou enflées ou collées, si elles laissent suinter du liquide ou du pus, sachez qu'il ne s'agit pas d'un courant d'air, mais d'une maladie grave.*"

"Let me see it," Clay said, and opened the *livret de famille* out on the table in front of him. There were six pages for entries of birth, with space provided for the official stamp and the signature of the *officier de l'état civil*, and after that came explicit directions for the care and feeding of infants.

"You must never wake a baby up to feed it," Clay said, reading, "and you don't wean it until after the ninth month, Hilda. It has to be registered within three days after birth . . ."

"Oh God, Clay, put that book down."

He looked up at her. "I'm sorry."

"Leave some romance in her life, Clay," Alice said. She and Hilda had ordered beer, but Clay and Roger were drinking brandy and already were flushed with its warmth.

"Clay, let's go home," Hilda said.

"Oh no. Stay around for another drink. We're celebrating."

"But the man is coming for the trunks. Someone has to be there."

"Well, let's have one more drink."

"I'll go back with you, Hilda," Alice said. "Roger, you stay around with Clay."

"Yes, Al-ees."

"And keep him sober," Hilda said. "Clay, give me that."

"The *livret de famille*?"

"Yes, that's for the bride."

"It says here it's to be kept with care by the head of the family."

"You don't think you can claim that title, do you?" She leaned over and kissed Clay lightly, then with the *livret* under her arm she went with Alice across the Avenue toward the Rue de Vanves.

"So you are married now, Clye," Roger said. "And she is a charming girl, Eelda. A very good wife for you."

"Roger, we'll have a drink on that. Garçon, encore deux fines."

"Clye, I am sorry to see you go away to America. We will mees you, Al-ees and I."

"I have to go, Roger. I have to go back home and be an adult. I'm twenty-six years old now. You know what I'm going to do?" He picked up the glass the waiter had brought. "Roger, I'm going to quit drinking altogether."

Roger laughed. "Clye, I do not trust a man of quick enthusiasms and sudden resolves. I theenk you will find the whiskee very good in America now that there ees no more prohibition."

"I haven't tasted rye whisky in years," Clay said. "I will have to try it. Garçon, avez-vous du rye whiskee?"

"Comment, Monsieur?"

"Il veut du whiskee," Roger said. "Du whiskee américain."

"Ah, du whiskee américain."

"En avez-vous?"

"Oui, Monsieur je crois que oui. Attendez un moment." The waiter went away and Roger looked at Clay with his eyebrows raised, saying, "Eef he has it, Clye, you do not need to go back to America."

"Not as long as the bottle lasts, anyhow."

"Voici, Monsieur." The waiter, smiling, put a quart bottle on the table.

"It is," Clay said. "Bourbon whisky, Roger. Garçon, deux verres, de la glace. On achetera la bouteille, toute la bouteille."

"Clye, we cannot dreenk all of it."

"We can try, Roger. This is la noce, Roger, la noce."

"Eh bien."

Clay picked up the bottle with a flourish and filled their glasses. "Santé, Roger."

"A la vôtre."

THE trunks were gone, and the crate of canvases, and the studio seemed bare and lifeless to Hilda ; the removal of the few familiar

objects of daily living had deprived it of individuality. The books were gone from the bookcase, the pictures from the wall, the cover from the divan and the curtains from the windows. There was moonlight and the scaffolding of the easel cast the shadowy shape of a gibbet on the wall as Hilda lay on the divan in the dark, smoking a cigarette and looking at the glowing shape of the skylight. Alice Rand had left hours before. They had bought chops at the *boucherie* on the Rue de Vanves and Hilda had made a salad of endive, and they had sat a long time over their coffee, the coffee which now kept her awake. Then, after the baggage man had come for the trunks, Alice had left her alone in the failing light of the studio, where Hilda had not often been alone. Now she thought of how much her life had changed in a year. A year ago she had begun, with brave directness, to experiment with her life, to shape and guide it, but how different a course it had taken from her expectations. She was married ; she was going home again. Once, when she was a little girl, she had said to her mother : *I'm going to keep my little bed forever, even when I'm married.* But you'll out-grow it, Hilda. . . *Oh no, I won't, Mama, and I'll marry a man to fit it, too,* she had said. Now she thought that Clay did fit her childhood bed, as surely as the little doll man the child was dreaming of. And she felt as protective, as possessive toward him, as a child with a doll. She had waited for hours in the studio alone for him that night. She was sure that he was drunk somewhere with Roger, but she could not be angry with him. Instead she had a full, tender feeling, thinking of him and of his gentle irresponsibility that forced her to arrange for the steamship tickets, to see that the trunks were shipped, to see that they reached the boat train on time. It was Clay's last night in Paris and even on their wedding night she could not be angry with him.

It was after midnight when he returned. She heard his steps on the gravel walk and she lay still on the divan, waiting. He fell against the door, and was a long time opening it, then he entered and she saw his silhouette against the moonlight.

"I'm awake," she said. "Turn on the light."

There was a brief pause, then the studio lights flashed bril-

liantly and she saw him leaning against the door, his face flushed and his eyes half-closed against the light.

"And so they lived happily ever after," Hilda said. "This is a hell of a wedding day."

"I'm sorry, Hilda. You see, we got tight. I didn't even know it was so late."

"It's all right, Clay. I'm not angry. You're entitled to your last fling." She went toward him. "But you're not a bachelor any more, darling."

"No."

"You've got to settle down in front of the fireplace with me."

"That's what I want to do."

"Life will be different for you, Clay. We'll both have to open our eyes, and you'll have to leave Paris behind you. I've been lying here thinking, which is no way for a bride to act, and I've decided that from now on I'm going to be very severe with you, for your own good. I've got you safely married to me now." She laughed, and he put his arms around her, his cheek against hers.

"Tomorrow we sail, Clay, and from tomorrow on you're going to be a serious, hard-working husband."

"Is this your way of reprimanding me for not coming home tonight?"

"Partly, but I mean it too. Remember, Clay — tomorrow."

"No," he said, looking at the clock. "It's today now."

End of Book Two

BOOK THREE

I

IN front of the limestone bank building there was still a hitching post ; there was a bench on which in the warm days of spring men in overalls, booted and with tall hats, sat and talked of crops and cattle as they had nearly sixty years before, in 1876, when Amon Hall first came to Rutherford. Then he had arrived on a stage coach, a young man in a rumpled black suit, a young man from Tennessee with a law degree in his pocket and five hundred dollars in his pigskin wallet that locked with a key. Ambitious then, self-centered and individualistic, he had never lingered at the loungers' bench on the corner, and now, an old man, he did not stop as he left the bank building and strode into the sunlight of the town square. He walked across the square that now was paved and blocked off by white lines into parking spaces. He walked heedless of the traffic across to the courthouse park and up the steps of the courthouse, through its dusty corridors and out again without stopping, out into the sun again. His lower teeth gnawed at the bristles of his gray moustache and his knees trembled as he stamped along the sidewalk. He turned from the square into an avenue lined with trees, at the end of it the yellow gabled house in which he had lived for more than fifty years, where he had raised his family, where his wife had died, and his son. Eighty-four years old, he could still see the gabled house at the end of the street, less clearly now, and today filmed with the astigmatism of his anger, the anger which made his knees give a little as he walked, which caused him to clench his hands until the veins stood out fat as caterpillars. Many times he had walked the mile from the courthouse to the yellow house, and in many moods : smiling and proud when he had won an important case, nervous and irritable when a doubtful issue occupied his thoughts, choleric when the jury had decided against

him. The mile of road had become important to him ; it had become a measure of his emotion, for in a mile of road a buoyant exhilaration can be deflated, a mounting anger can abate. The mile of road became a measure of degree ; only a deep resentment could out-last it, only a true excitement. To walk the mile of road was for Amon Hall like a small boy counting ten ; in that time he could analyse and sometimes curb his emotion, of whatever sort. So, starting angrily from the courthouse, he would often climb the steps to the piazza of the gabled house mildly, silently, and sink in relaxation into his wicker rocking chair. But today, when yet a long way off from the yellow gables, he peered ahead to see if Olivia was on the piazza, to see if she was there to hear him, an ear for the words bursting to his lips. And seeing the faded purple of her dress, her white hair, he hurried across the street and stumbled up the stone steps of the terraced lawn toward the house. She was in her rocking chair under the canopy of ivy, reading a letter, and as soon as he climbed the steps to the weathered boards of the porch she called : "Papa — a letter from Clay. — He's married."

Amon Hall did not answer. He walked deliberately along the porch toward her with a movement of his shoulders that seemed to dislodge her words as a dog shaking water from its coat. He leaned against the railing and took off his black hat. His scant gray hair was damp and adhered to his head, moulding it to a melon shape.

"Shall I read it to you, Papa ? — He's on his way back now. Maybe today he's landing in New York. Do you want to hear it ?"

"No. Not now, Olivia."

Olivia sighed and glanced at the sheet of paper glaring white in sunlight against her purple dress. "I'm glad Clay's married, but I declare I wish I'd seen her first." She looked up at Amon. "He doesn't say a thing about how she looks. I wonder if she has blue eyes like Clay. She's a blonde, he said. He *did* say that."

Amon began to walk up and down on the porch behind her, fanning his face with his hat.

"Listen, Papa : *It's an indescribable feeling, Aunt Olivia, to be returning to America after so many years away. It will seem strange to hear people speaking English on the streets and to pronounce English words as they should be pronounced, to be Mr. Hall and not Monsieur 'All. I feel at home again already, just thinking of it.*"

"At home again," Amon interrupted. "How soon will he get here, Olivia?"

"He may have landed already."

"I mean here — here in Texas. When is he coming home?"

"He doesn't speak of that, Papa. He only talks about New York. He says . . ."

"Never mind, Olivia." Amon returned toward her and sat down at her side, his lips twisted with impatience.

Olivia bent her head in silence over the letter and he sat looking out across the lawn at the line of sycamore trees which he had planted years before.

"Olivia," he said after a moment. "I remember once I nearly bought a ranch in Jack County. It was in wild country, with a growth of evergreen on the hills and deep grass on the flat, and there was a herd of spotted horses that went with the ranch. — Olivia, do you hear?"

"Yes, Papa, yes." She raised her head.

"You weren't listening."

"I was reading Clay's letter, Papa. It came only a few minutes before you got here and I haven't had time to read it through carefully. — I think he's going to stay in New York for a while, Papa. He's planning to have a show of his paintings. — I'm so anxious to see them."

"Why don't he come home here to Texas? I tell you, Olivia, that boy's got no sense."

"He's a grown man now, Papa. He's not a boy any more."

"He's got no sense. Why don't he come home where he belongs? We need Clay here."

"Why don't you write to him, Papa, and tell him that?" Olivia said, resentful of bearing the burden of his temper.

"You write to him, Olivia. Yes, you tell him I want him

back here. I'm going to stock the ranch right away and I want him to run it." Amon rubbed the back of his hand across his upper lip. "I want him right away. I want to make some money out of that property this year. I want that ranch to pay." His cheeks were high-colored and there were blood-flecks on his long nose. "Listen, Olivia, do you remember when I nearly bought that ranch in Jack County, the one with the spotted horses?"

"No, Papa."

"Well, you were just a little girl then. But it had a herd of pinto ponies, as alike as Mexican daisies, and the prettiest you ever saw. They went with the ranch, Olivia, and it was a fine parcel of land — about ten thousand acres, I remember. Your mother wanted those spotted horses too, and we decided to buy it. The country was rough and hilly and fine to look at and those spotted horses grazing on the flat land against the evergreen on the hills made a pretty picture, I can tell you. Your brother would have remembered it. Yes, Mark was just a boy, but he wanted those spotted horses. There was a young filly there he wanted to train for himself. He said he'd break her himself, too, but I don't think Mark was ever brave enough to do that. He was a timid boy." Amon turned toward her, his eyes deep in the shadow of their recessed sockets, his long nose pointing at her. "Olivia I went to the bank to arrange a sale then, and do you know what they told me?"

"Yes, Papa?"

"Why, I thought you didn't remember that ranch."

"I mean yes, go on, Papa. Tell me about it."

"Well, I saw Mr. Pruett and told him I wanted to buy that land and would need a little financing and he said to me, 'Amon, your credit is good at this bank for as much as a hundred thousand dollars any day. You only have to ask for it.'"

"That's very flattering, Papa."

"Flattering! Why, Olivia, why damn it, he knew I was good for it. Why, I had the best law practice in the state of Texas. I was a Congressman then. I was a leading citizen. I helped make Paladora County. Of course I was good for it."

"Yes, Papa. I meant it was nice to have him recognize that." The letter rustled in Olivia's nervous hand and she turned her eyes away from him, as always a little frightened of him when he swore.

Amon remained silent for a time, looking out at the street, at the wide lawn, then he sighed and shook his head. "Well, Olivia, I went to the bank today. I went to Mr. Pruett, Olivia, and do you know what he said? — He talked about the depression. He talked about scarce money. He talked about the beef market. And Olivia, by God, he wouldn't lend me the money! The same man, Olivia, when I wanted to buy those spotted horses he said I could take the bank away under my arm if I wanted to, and today he wouldn't lend me a cent. He wouldn't lend me money to stock my ranch, Olivia."

"Why, Papa!"

"Oh, he talked about stockholders and so on, and how if it was just himself he had to consider he'd do it, but that he had to have collateral, Olivia. Collateral for a twenty thousand dollar loan and before he said I could have a hundred thousand just on my word, just on my personal note."

"I suppose times have changed, Papa. I suppose you'd better give him the collateral."

"You mean mortgage the ranch to him, Olivia? Mortgage it again?"

"Is it mortgaged now, Papa?"

"Yes, there's a first mortgage. I put it on when I built those bungalows. What folly that was, to build a block of bungalows just before the crash."

"But, Papa, why don't you give him stock or something for collateral?"

"Stock?" Amon said. "Stock!" He struck his fist on the arm of the rocking chair. "I tell you, Olivia, they're all thieves. The bankers are thieves, the . . ."

"Not Mr. Pruett, Papa."

"He ain't much better than a thief. The next thing he'll do will be to foreclose on my furniture factory. I know that. I could tell it by the way he talked. — I can't make that factory

pay. I can't put my men on a forty hour week and make it pay. I can't give them the wages they want and make anything out of it — not with the big companies underselling me twenty cents on the dollar. No, I'll have to let that factory go and he'll be glad to grab it up."

"I didn't know things were that bad at the factory, Papa."

"Well, they are. That's why I've got to stock the ranch for as much as the range will carry. And I'll have to put another mortgage on to do it."

"But, Papa, why don't you simply give some of your stock as collateral?"

"Stock, Olivia? What stock? No stock I have is worth a nickel. Not a nickel, I tell you."

"But the copper stock, Papa. — What do you mean?"

"Thieves, Olivia! — It's been stolen from me — right out from under my nose. It's selling for less than a dollar a share, Olivia, and I paid 98 for it. That company is crooked from top to bottom, and I'll prove it. I'll have them all in jail, Olivia."

Amon jumped out of his chair and began to walk up and down again. "Do you hear? I'll put them behind jail bars, Olivia, where they belong. — Olivia, all I've got left is that ranch, and I've got to mortgage that again — an eighty thousand dollar property five years ago, but what is it worth to me now?"

"You have the bungalows too, Papa," Olivia said with quiet finality, wanting to return to the letter in her lap, but his smouldering eyes were fixed on her.

"Why, I built them on a mortgage. They have a mortgage for a foundation instead of bricks and the equity in them wouldn't pay a man to mow the lawn. Those houses haven't earned a cent since the day they were built. You know that. — What can a man do, with the taxes he has to pay? And more taxes all the time, Olivia, it's hard to believe. It don't seem right for a Democratic government to spend so much money. We'll have to pay for that, Olivia. I have to pay for it both ways. — By God, when the government tells you a man can't work more than forty hours a week, it's ridiculous! Why we worked twelve hours a day when I first came to Texas! And we got things done

too. And six days a week too, every day but Sunday, and Sunday was a day of rest like the Lord intended. A day of rest after a full week's honest work. That's the way men lived since Moses was found in the bulrushes, Olivia, and here they try to change it overnight. They try to change the whole world overnight, and it's gone insane. It's like the crazy days after the Civil War when everything was turned topsy-turvy. — Plowing a crop of cotton into the ground ! Olivia, did you ever hear of such a thing ?"

"It doesn't seem to make sense, Papa."

"It's plain crazy. Think of it, Olivia — it's just about a year ago when they had to close down all the banks and Mr. Pruett was walking along the street like a ghost, and now he won't lend me even twenty thousand dollars. They close down the banks to save Mr. Pruett, but what do they do for the cattleman, Olivia ? What do they do for the farmer ? They make him plow his cotton under. Whoever heard of anything like that ! And listen here, Olivia, I put ninety-eight thousand dollars into that copper company and today I couldn't get a thousand back. And do you know what salary the president of the company gets today ? — A hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars, Olivia !"

"My goodness, more than the President of the United States." Olivia looked up and saw Amon's face. "Papa, you'd better sit down."

He stood by a pillar of the porch, one clenched fist pressed to his temples, and his eyes were closed.

"Papa, what's the matter ?"

"Nothing, Olivia — my head."

"Oh, Papa." Olivia stood up in a rustle of silk. "Now you must learn to control yourself. You know you must."

Amon was breathing shallowly ; he said in a whisper : "It's bursting open. I feel dizzy, Olivia."

"Papa, oh, Lord !" Olivia took his arm. "Papa, come inside."

He leaned against her, going with her to the door, saying : "My knees are weak as a new-born filly's. — Olivia, I'm getting old."

"It's time you found that out," she said crisply, and led him to the horsehair sofa in his study, near the windows. He lay down upon it, closing his eyes, and his breathing was rapid, through parted lips.

"Papa, I'm going to call the doctor."

"I'm all right, Olivia."

"But I'm going to call him this time. Now you wait."

"No." He opened his eyes. "We've got no money to waste on doctor's bills, Olivia. It's just a touch of sun." She had already started from the room, and he half-rose, his weight on one elbow, then closed his eyes and sank back on the sofa.

Later Olivia waited on the porch while Dr. Valentine sat with Amon in the study. Amon was breathing freely now, and he smiled, saying: "It's exasperating, Doctor. It's annoying to a man when his body gives out on him. Why, I feel younger than you do. I'm alert and active as a yearling, but my bones are just tired out. I can feel every bone in my body this minute."

"You'll have to lead a quieter life, Senator. A man with your blood pressure can't prance around like a bantam rooster." The doctor pursed his lips and glanced aside. There was pathos in Amon's manner, in his eager attempt to speak lightly of his health, so apparently a studied effort to influence the diagnosis.

"Senator," he said slowly, "you're over eighty years old now, aren't you?"

"A little over that."

"It's eighty-five, isn't it?"

"Well, not until fall."

"You ought to live to be a hundred. Yes, I think you will."

Amon smiled, and sat up. His collar was unbuttoned and his tie hung in two strands on his shirtfront. His thin hair was rumpled.

"But wait a minute," Dr. Valentine said. "You won't live six months if you go on acting like a frisky colt. Senator, you've got to settle down." Amon frowned, and the doctor smiled and pointed a finger at him. "Yes, you've got to settle down by the fireside. — Senator, do you ever listen to the radio?"

"Olivia has one. I hear it sometimes."

"You'll find some mighty interesting programs. Now last night the President talked."

"Yes, I heard that," Amon said sharply.

"And say, Senator, there's a pair of blackface comedians who go on at the same time every evening — the regular story of their life. You ought to listen in."

"I've got no time for that nonsense."

"Make time for it, man. Make time for it. Find another interest for yourself. Relax and enjoy life, Senator. You've reached the age where you're entitled to it."

"Doctor Valentine, listen to me." Amon's eyes burned bright. "Yes, I'm an old man. I'm an old man in body, but not in mind, and I won't be talked to like an old man, do you understand? I'm not senile. Now what is it you want to tell me?"

The doctor laughed. "I guess that's the most sensible way to go about it. — Senator, the time has come for you to retire."

"Retire, eh?"

"Yes, no more law practice. No more cares and worries."

"No more cares and worries! Why, Valentine . . ."

"Now easy. Relax, Senator, relax. Now lie down again — there. Say, you've got more temper than a Hereford bull. Of course we all have our worries, Senator, but what I mean is you've got to quit taking on other people's troubles. You've got to quit work, that's all — avoid excitement."

"I've got to look after my ranch."

"I guess you can do that. — Why don't you get your grandson to come home and handle that for you?"

"Maybe I will. Yes, I've thought about that."

"But anyhow you've got to take it easy. Tune in on the radio some day, Senator. You'll find plenty to interest you. These are busy days."

"Yes," Amon said.

"After you've had a good rest, after you've gotten used to it, you'll feel better about it."

"Yes," Amon said.

"You've got to take this seriously, Senator. Now you listen

to me. No activity, no work, a very light diet and plenty of sleep.—I'm going to talk to Miss Olivia and she'll see to it that you do as I say."

Amon lay still on the sofa, looking at his hands, looking with distaste at the swollen veins and the skin that was old, and dry and brittle as a snake's discarded skin.

II

In the failing light Clay sat in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a cigarette and looking at the paintings on the wall of the gallery. In the dim light they seemed lifeless and dull in their heavy frames ; they seemed unfamiliar to him, lacking all association with the hours of labor in his studio in Paris, in the fields of Provence or on a rugged hill of the Côte des Maures. There was a sickly feeling of exposure to have them hung against the beige monk's cloth for all to see, and he felt dubious and unhappy. The exhilaration, the optimism, had passed and his mood was very different from the night when the steamer had drawn away from the coast of France, when he had lain by the port-hole, looking back at the flickering lights of Boulogne, thinking then that he would never see France again and treasuring the nostalgia of that moment morbidly because the future would take him so far away from it. He no longer felt the light-hearted expectancy that then had buoyed him. Very soon the eager, awakened impressions of his arrival in New York, when he had stood at the rail as the boat steamed at night up the river to the pier, had passed. Then the buildings of Manhattan had been crystal-like and mysterious. Seeing the city from the river at night there had been no thought of the millions of men and women crowded within it, but only of the solid masses, the unreal lights.

In the salon they had stood in line with their passports, Hilda ahead of Clay, and the Irish immigration inspector to whom she gave her passport had said roughly : "Who's Hilda James ? There's no Hilda James on the list."

"We were married in France," Clay explained. "She's Mrs. Clayton Hall." He had put his own passport and the *livret de*

famille on the green baize cloth and he remembered the inspector's red-faced grin, his soft voice saying : "A romance, eh ? Well, that's different. Well, good luck, young man. Welcome back home, both of you."

They had returned to the deck in a pleased glow of good spirits and Hilda had said : "Nothing so personal as that would have happened in France. . It is good to be back in America, isn't it ? Clay, that's what's been missing from our lives — being home where we belong, where they speak our language, where we aren't foreigners any more."

Once ashore, when they had stowed their luggage in a hotel near Washington Square, Hilda at once had wanted oyster stew at the Grand Central Terminal ; it was the most typical means she could imagine of formalizing their return. She had spoken of it before on the voyage home, tired of Portuguese oysters, watery as the sea and green as moss. And for two days after that they had gone back to the things they remembered in New York, to the museums, to an Italian puppet show on Mulberry Street where a hundred pound Roland clashed with a Saracen chief in metallic *battaglia*, to a German Hoffbräu Haus near Third Avenue — "Did we come back to America to study Italian folk ways and eat German food ?" Hilda had asked — and even to the Bronx Zoo. Then, with a letter of introduction, Clay had gone to see Vincent Meyer, an art dealer with a gallery a block from Lower Fifth Avenue, in a remodelled brownstone house ; a gallery of small rooms with beige monk's cloth on the walls. The season was nearing its end and surprisingly he was given a week to show his paintings. There was barely enough time to prepare invitations and a catalogue, which Clay must pay for, and to shop for frames with Hilda murmuring at their expense.

Now Clay had finished hanging the pictures and he examined them relentlessly. Some of his early work was there, as well as the latest painting after his experimentation with the hill town on the Côte des Maures had changed his direction, but in none of them did he feel confidence. He was silent and morose at dinner with Hilda that night and would not discuss with her the expense of the show, the vernissage.

"Just let's wait and see what happens," he said impatiently. "Don't worry about it, please."

"I can't help it, Clay. One of us has to worry." But she smiled, and pressed his hand under the table.

Vincent Meyer was waiting at the gallery when they returned after dinner. He wore black studs and a wide black tie that spread across his shirtfront, as his black hair spread across his collar at the back. His large head was fitted to his sloping shoulders with the appearance of having no neck at all, and when he turned his head his whole torso moved stiffly, in an automaton manner, and his small eyes came to a fixed focus like olive pits in his coarse-skinned yellow face. The deliberate tones of his husky voice seemed a manœuvre for delay while his sharp eyes studied and appraised. He stood holding an unlighted cigar in short fingers, on one of which was a diamond ring, saying: "Well, all right, so now you're back again. You're late. I've been waiting." The inflection of his voice was accusing, but without emphasis positive enough to elicit an apology. "There's a reporter here to do a feature story for you."

"A reporter?" Clay said. "I don't know what to say to a reporter, Mr. Meyer. What does he want?"

"You just got to answer questions, that's all. — Now that's one thing you got to do, Mr. Hall. I'm risking money; I'm investing in you. I give you a week at my gallery when maybe I could show a painter better known, a seller. Why, nobody ever heard of you. You must help me with the publicity; it's better for you than advertisements in the paper. — Now come on. He's at the punch bowl. — And you too, Mrs. Hall. It's good to have a pretty girl along. You know, to have a pretty girl, that makes it authentic to a newspaperman. That shows you thought about it some, and it makes a picture to go with the story."

They found the reporter standing by the punch bowl looking at Clay's painting of the old *charbonnier* of the Rue d'Alésia.

"This is Mr. Hall," Meyer had said loudly. "Here's the artist. And this is Mrs. Hall. — I didn't catch your name."

"Berryman."

"Well, here's the artist, Mr. Berryman. Ask him anything you want to."

The reporter took a double-folded sheaf of copypaper from the pocket of his coat. "Say, I've been looking at your pictures. Now that one over there — what does it mean ?"

"What does it mean ?" Clay reached nervously for a glass of punch.

"Yes. What's it a picture of ? What does it represent ? That's all I wanted to know. I don't understand much about this modern stuff."

"That's a hill town in France," Clay said.

"Now I may be dumb about it, but how do you get a hill town out of that ?"

"It's not a portrait of the town. It's a picture — something to hang on the wall and get pleasure from. It doesn't have to look like a hill town for that, does it ?"

"Then why do you call it a hill town ?"

"A hill town gave me the basic forms. You see . . ." Clay shuddered and turned his head aside, seeing the bright amused eyes of the reporter fastened on the painting of the *charbonnier* as he said : "Now this one I understand all right. I can see that's the picture of an old guy with a sack of coal on his back. Now that's plain enough. I know what I'm looking at." He put his glass down and took a soft-leaded pencil from a vest pocket. "How long did you live abroad, Mr. Hall ?"

"Five years."

"Now I've got to get some sort of angle, something to hang the story on. Listen, why did you go to France in the first place and stay so long ? Why is it there were so many expatriates over there ?"

"Painters have always gone to France, since the days of Les Fauves. Things happen in painting in Paris and you have to go there to see it, to mix in with it."

"Not many going now, are they ? It looks to me like everybody's coming back again."

"Well, conditions have changed," Clay said. "When I first

went to France it was still in that decade when imaginative people were fleeing from America. They felt stifled here. They were in rebellion against the lack of cultural life and the homely materialism of this country. In France they could be free and they met people who thought as they did. They created an artificial world for themselves in place of the world they disliked. That was true in my case too. I lived a life which functionally was artificial. There was no ground under my feet. It was like living in a soap bubble."

"And now the bubble's burst," the reporter said, scribbling on his copypaper. Hilda stood watching them with a quizzical smile, and the reporter's eyes turned again and again to her. Clay was self-conscious and talked fast. "Yes, it's burst all right," he said. "But it was time for it to burst, too. In those days when every broker's runner dreamed of making a fortune, when everyone thought of money and stocks and bonds, there was no place for the artist. Who would buy a painting when he could buy stock? France was a haven for us, and if we all drank a lot it was partly because of our prohibition environment here, partly because of the basic rootlessness that was inescapable no matter how pleasant the life. Just to sit in a *café* by the hour and let time slip by was in itself a defiance of what we had gone to France to escape; it was thumbing our nose at the frenzy of America. Some of us went to extremes and took freedom for license, but those who went to Paris to work did work."

"Why is it any different now, Mr. Hall? Go on, I can use this stuff."

"Well, the world is different," Clay said, and he had become pompous in phrasing the half-formed ideas in his mind. "You can't sit in a *café* now and thumb your nose at men in a breadline, can you? We were in rebellion. They called it rebellion against the machine age, but it was more like sabotage. We were sabotaging our generation. We wanted to smash it or escape from it. Now I feel, and I think most of us feel, that we must find our place in society and give whatever we can to it. If there is any cultural lack it's up to us to supply it and not run

away because of it. . ." They had drunk several glasses of punch and when the reporter left half an hour later Clay felt glowing and important and Hilda said, "I didn't know you were so articulate, Clay." The small rooms of the gallery now were crowded, and there were people Clay had known in France to be greeted. Among them was Gussie Norton. Clay saw her sleek red hair, her solid body, as she stood before one of the paintings, and they hurried toward her. Her soft bosom pressed against him and one of her plump arms went about his neck as she kissed him, saying : "Your show is swell, Clay."

"Didn't you know there was a punch bowl here ? Come have a drink."

"No, thanks."

"No ? — Gussie !"

"I don't drink anything but beer, Clay. I'm a changed woman."

"But you're shattering an ideal. Where is the big Rabelaisian Gussie I used to know ?"

"Big Rabelaisian Gussie is now serious, hard-working Gussie." She laughed deep in her throat. "I'm teaching English to foreigners. — It's a government job, Clay. Relief, you know. I'm a social worker now."

"You always were, Gussie. You've picked more people out of the gutter than the Salvation Army."

"And now I've picked myself out of it too. — Clay, it's good to see you again."

"You remember Hilda, don't you — my wife."

"I heard you two were married." Gussie's soft hands closed on Hilda's warmly, with an instant friendliness. "I want you both to come down and see me, Clay. I hang out down in the Village, at the Vardo."

"The Vardo ?"

"Yes, that means gypsy caravan. It's a Romany place." Gussie firmly refused to drink even one glass of punch and when she left Clay and Hilda remained by the punch bowl until their muscles ached from standing and watching the slow circulation of people along the walls of the gallery.

The next day, in the second section of an evening newspaper, Clay found the interview with himself, and a photograph with the caption *THE LAST EXPATRIATE*. The story read : *The bubble has burst and the Paris expatriates are flocking home again because of the depression, Clayton Hall, American artist who has lived for the past five years in France, said today.*

"We used to sit in Paris cafés and thumb our noses at America," he said, "But the depression has brought us home again and we're glad to be here."

There was half a column of it, and all that day Clayton writhed, remembering the lines : *Mr. Hall admitted that the expatriate group "took freedom for license" and spent most of its time drinking. Very little work was done, he said. Instead there were midnight orgies with artists' models and beaucoup champagne.* . . .

"What difference does it make ?" Hilda said. "You got your picture in the paper."

"Yes, 'the last expatriate.' Well, there's disillusionment number one, Hilda. — I suppose I have been a little inflated."

That Sunday there was a brief notice in the art section, which spoke of his "sensitive color." *This artist shows the influence of the French impressionists rather than the American technicians. There is a subtle range of color harmony to be found, but little originality either in theme or treatment. This is Mr. Hall's first show, and continues for one week at the Meyer Galleries.*

They did not talk of the failure of his show, even when they were taking the canvases away to put in storage. There had been one tentative buyer, but no painting had been definitely sold. Vincent Meyer kept a few pictures at the gallery, saying : "Maybe some day I sell them. Do not give up hope, young man." His voice was kindly. "For a first show, it was not too bad. You should not be disappointed. I tell you, some time when there is a group of young artists to exhibit, I submit your paintings for you. Now go ahead, you paint some more."

"When even a commercial dealer like Meyer says that, you should be greatly encouraged, Clay," Hilda told him.

"Perhaps the Senator was right when he said I wasn't cut out to be a painter."

"But Meyer believes in you, and so do I, Clay." They were in their hotel room and she sat down on the bed. Clay was at the window looking down at the shabby elegance of Washington Square. "Clay, how much money have we left?"

"A few hundred dollars." He shrugged his shoulders.

"That won't last very long."

"No."

"Well?"

He turned to her and spread his hands. "Don't strike me when I'm down, Hilda. I know we'll have to do something soon, but just now I'm confused. I can't bring myself to worry about it."

"Clay, I'm going to get a job."

"You are?"

"I'm probably the only member of the family who can, Clay. After all, I *have* worked."

He sat down in a chair by the window, looking at her steadily. "There's plenty of time to talk about that, Hilda. — I'm a good draughtsman. I can probably do commercial work."

"But you don't want to do commercial work, Clay. You want to paint. And if I can help you to do that, I want to."

"You're a sweet girl, Hilda." He came over and put his arm around her. "But no."

"But I have it all worked out, Clay. — Listen. I'll find us a small apartment somewhere, furnished, and with light enough for you to work. Then I'll start at Fifty-seventh Street, at the top of commercial Fifth Avenue, and work my way downtown until I find a job. Now why not?"

"It would be a good idea to find an apartment, anyway."

"Down here in the Village. — Maybe even a small studio, Clay, if we can afford it. Oh, find the classified section in that mess of papers, will you?"

"All right. — But, Hilda, I don't want you to work. I'll find something to do, don't worry."

III

THERE were casement windows and ochre yellow curtains which moved in a breeze so faint that it barely stirred the warm spring air in the small apartment — one room, kitchenette and bath — that Hilda had rented furnished on Jones Street. She did not close the windows against the noise in the street, the clamor of boys playing in its block-long length, because the small room was stuffy and airless. She lay on the divan in brassière and panties, her body moist and hot. The brocaded material of the divan cover chafed her flesh, but she was too tired to get to her feet and turn the cover back, to rest her weight again on feet that were sore and aching from a long day of walking in high heels, of standing waiting to be interviewed. And there had been three days of this wasting fatigue ; the muscles of her calves and thighs were stiff.

Clay was out. His portable easel stood in the corner with a small canvas on it, a sketch of a street scene that he had begun two days before and had not finished. He was out now, walking somewhere. "I want to get the feeling of New York," he had said, and with a sketch-pad in his pocket he had walked each day, along the waterfront, under the elevated structure, in the maze of streets along the Bowery.

Hilda had found an apartment without difficulty, selected it the first day. It was small and the furniture was shabby and appropriate, in taste with the cheap Indian print that covered half of one wall, but they could be comfortable there. Jones Street opened off the crowded pushcart market of Bleecker Street and boys came from blocks around to play in it because of little traffic, but she could endure the noise. And she could endure the garbage cans which each day spilled refuse into the street, festering in the sun. But now fatigue robbed her of the pleasure, the exhilaration, with which she had returned to New York, with which she had begun her systematic applications in Fifth Avenue stores, making each day some new excuse to Clay for her absence. Now she had travelled all the way down to Forty-second Street

and still was unemployed. The first morning she had been unable to get past the reception desk, and angrily she had lunched at a chain drug store, her knees and elbows drawn together in the noon crowd, sipping a malted milk with her sandwich in the added heat of a toaster which glowed two feet away from her. And after lunch she had gone out again with nerves like harp strings, had swept up to the girl at a desk behind a railing, saying : "I'm going out of town tomorrow. I only have ten minutes." Her confidence had succeeded, and presently she was in the office of a small man wearing a gardenia, with very bright impersonal eyes, who leaned back in his chair to look at her.

"I've worked in Paris, for Paul Nicolle," Hilda said. "I've just come back."

"We're not taking on anyone now. Did you sell?"

"No. I modelled for Nicolle — for over a year."

He wet his lips, with a small shake of his head. "You're a little thin."

"Thin for modelling!" Hilda was incredulous.

"Well, maybe not thin. — But not youthful. You got to have that radiant look here. You know, breathless, sort of."

"Oh," Hilda said.

"Sorry. You can fill out an application form outside, though, and if we need you . . ."

Hilda disdained the application form ; she went angrily to the elevator. But at the next store, after an hour's wait for the interview, after again the impersonal appraisal with slightly knit eyebrows, a vaguely puzzled expression, when she was told : "no opening now," she filled out a form and watched the secretary flip it into a drawer with an air of finality and return to her typewriter.

Two days of this had unnerved Hilda. She had returned each night exhausted to Jones Street, and she must market then and cook dinner for Clay, must smile and pretend that she had spent the day aimlessly, shopping. But as soon as the sunlight streamed in the window the next morning — and at night she had gone to sleep fixing in her mind the thought that she must awaken at eight, since she could not set an alarm clock to awaken

her — she pulled her stiff body out of bed and in the bathroom scoured from her skin the stale caked powder she had been too tired to remove the night before, painstakingly freshened her complexion as best she could with a light dusting powder that softly toned her skin. She had bought new dresses, cheap dresses that required long hours of searching among grasping, sweaty women at a store on Union Square where gimlet eyes spied on her. She knew clothes, and a long search among thousands of garments hanging on the racks for any customer to handle had rewarded her. She had started out immaculate each morning but by noon the powder had clotted with perspiration on her face, had become thick with renewals, and her dress was wrinkled and shapeless at the hips. And in the evening she was very tired. Returning home that afternoon she had stopped for a cocktail in the bar of a hotel, had sought refreshing air by riding downtown on a bus, but once in the stuffy apartment she had been weak ; she had taken off her clothes and thrown herself down on the divan. Now she was too tired to get up and take a bath, too tired to dress and market among the litter and pushcarts of Bleecker Street. If only she could go to sleep ; if she could forget the noise of the children in the street and go to sleep. She asked nothing further. She lay with her eyes closed and her face turned toward the window so that any vagrant current of air would not escape her. But the sound of voices rose and fell. She could hear words and phrases, and sudden shrill screams, and she could not keep her eyes closed. After a while she got up and took a cool bath and felt a faint flush of energy. But when Clay came home he looked at her and said : "Say, you don't look very well."

"I feel fine," she said crossly, dropping into the chair by the window.

"You need to relax a little. Let's go out to dinner somewhere and have a few drinks."

Hilda dressed, and they picked their way along the street among the litter of refuse, avoiding a boy in full flight after a ball, and turned east, away from Sheridan Square. Walking aimlessly toward the elevated structure they saw a sign, a round

wicker disc on which was painted *Vardo*, and Clay said : "That's where Gussie Norton hangs out. Let's look it over." They went into a long dim room in which glowed tables of bleached wood, deep-cut with initials and small pictures carved, torsos and faces outlined by brown grooves in the wood. A woman with a full torso, in the spreading skirts of a gypsy costume, with brass earrings dangling and eyes wide and friendly beneath very black and thick eyebrows, looked at them and said : "Hello." She showed them to one of the tables. Her arms swept round and soft from the short sleeves of an embroidered jacket ; her hands were short-fingered, brown and stub-nailed ; strong, patient but sensitive hands. She brought a menu from an adjoining table and Clay asked her : "Have you seen Miss Norton recently ?"

"Gussie Norton ? Are you a friend of Gussie's ?" The woman's husky voice quickened in a personal, friendly manner. "She's here nearly every night — not quite so early."

The woman took their orders and then returned from the kitchen in the rear and sat at the table with them. "I haven't seen you in here before," she said. "I'm Therese."

"We've just come back to New York," Hilda explained. "We knew Gussie in Paris."

"There's someone from Paris here now," Therese said. "Over there in the corner. — Do you know him ?"

Clay turned his head.

"Guy Hart," Therese said.

"For God's sake," Clay said. They saw Guy get to his feet and recognized his quick, nervous movements, the slight swaying of his body as he crossed the room toward them. His red lips were smiling. "Clay, mon vieux, I've been looking for you. Where have you been ?"

"Why, it's only a few weeks since we left you in Paris. You were going to Barcelona, Guy. — When did you blow in here, and why ?" Guy smiled and leaned over to shake their hands, his own soft and limp.

"I got in day before yesterday, Clay. Spain is so damned unsettled now." He sat down across the table from Clay, grinning, his thick lips curling under his nose. "Paris is hellish. I

didn't know what to do with myself, so I thought I'd come back and see what New York was like. Here, let's have a drink. What will you have?"

They ordered martinis and when Therese had gone away Guy glanced at them, smiling still, with the cruel dimples deep in cheeks which now seemed a little slack. "So you two are still married."

"Of course we're still married," Clay said. "Why not?"

Hilda sat straighter in her chair. "Your jaw looks all right, Guy — perhaps a little more masculine with that lump in it."

He smiled at her and Hilda turned her eyes away, realizing the futility of counter-attack with him. "I still have my dimples," he said. "Where are you living?"

"Around on Jones Street," Clay said.

Guy took out a leather notebook and wrote in the address. As he bent over, Hilda studied his face and there was change marked for her to see, or else she saw him more clearly. His face seemed softer, his mannerisms more definite, his eyebrows more plainly arched. Therese began to serve the dinner then and Guy talked, sipping his second cocktail : "God, but Paris is dismal. The people walk around the streets like steel springs and the bars are nearly empty. Montparnasse is through, Clay. It's gone native. — What are you two doing?"

"Painting a little — getting settled. Guess I'll have to look for a job pretty soon."

"I'm going to find a job, too," Hilda said.

"I see," Guy said, looking at her steadily, and Clay laughed and said : "No she isn't. She's going to be a housewife."

"Did you ever see such southern pride?" Hilda said.

"Oh, that's not the reason."

"Then why?"

"I don't think you ought to work. You need rest."

As they ate Guy's voice went on with the jerky animation of old as he talked interminably about himself, and Hilda ceased to pay attention, occasionally glancing up to nod when he paused. By the time they had finished their coffee he had drunk two more cocktails and ordered a Scotch and soda, and then Gussie Norton

came in. There were a dozen people in the restaurant and nearly all of them knew Gussie and spoke to her, and her tiny eyes sparkled in her fat cheeks ; she waved a plump arm. Then she saw Clay and Hilda.

"Well, my God. I wondered if you would ever come around." She sat down beside Hilda. "Say, I'm glad to see you. Clay, how was the show ?"

"It was a flop."

"No, it was a beautiful show."

"It was a beautiful flop. I didn't sell a picture."

"People with money don't have good taste. That's the reason."

"They're both looking for jobs now," Guy said.

"You'll find them," Gussie said. "You're clever, Clay, and a girl as pretty as you are, Hilda . . ." But there was a certain hesitation in Gussie's tone that disturbed Hilda. She noticed Gussie's quick glance at her face and her shoulders sloping wearily as she leaned with her elbows on the table. "But you look a little tired, Hilda."

"I suppose it's the spring."

"What sort of work do you do ?"

"Modeling. I used to be a mannequin for Paul Nicolle."

"I'm working for the government — a relief project," Gussie said. "It's a lot different from the old days in Paris, isn't it ? There I always seemed to be out of a job, but it never worried me. I could find another, or I could always walk into the Jockey when Hiler ran it, or into the Sélect or the Dingo. These last few years it's been hard sledding, though, and now it scares me. Paris is so small and personal compared to New York — like a small town. You can find a toe-hold there. I used to think a girl could go on through life living as she pleased — you know, the old gusto girl, the old joy of living. Get up in the morning and have a shot of brandy for breakfast. Sleep anywhere if you didn't have a bed of your own. Or Christ, why go to bed at all ! — Well, I guess a girl's got about five years of that in her, and I've had mine. That belongs to youth, and that kind of youth is only ten per cent of your life. Now I have to sleep nights so

I can work the next day without prying my eyes open with matchsticks. I feel I've got to hang onto that job so I won't starve and I never had that feeling before."

"Say, I'd like to find a job," Guy broke in.

"You, Guy?" Hilda looked at him scoffingly. "With your income?"

"I haven't any income. I've been spending principal for years. Besides, I'd like to be working."

"Aren't you writing?" Clay asked.

"Sure, but what's the use? It's hard to get poetry published and it doesn't pay peanuts. I've got to find a job sometime." Guy had been drinking heavily and his face was flushed; his eyes roved over the room. "God, I wish I hadn't come back to America. I wish Paris hadn't been spoiled. — It's not like it used to be, Gussie."

"Neither is New York," Gussie said. "That's something you have to make up your mind to, Guy."

"I don't want to make up my mind to it. — I think I'll head out for Mexico in about another month. It's cheap down there and people don't talk about economics and fascism. Those are the clichés of this decade. It was Babbitts and the machine age in the twenties. People get intense over something every few years and expect everybody else to be just as excited about it as they are. I've seen plenty of causes lived through and forgotten."

"And you've stayed just the same," Hilda said crisply.

"I've remained an individual, sure."

"But your thoughts now are just about what they were ten years ago. Your viewpoint is the same."

"You, too, Hilda?" Guy laughed. "Here, have a drink." He called for Therese.

Gussie laughed deeply, her full bosom shaking. "Guy hasn't felt the pinch yet, you see. He hasn't been desperate. But I have, and I don't want a park bench for a bed — not while I'm sober. No, I'm a serious woman now. I work hard and I belong to a union and I'm one of the pee-pul." She laughed.

"What union, Gussie?" Hilda asked.

"On my project. It doesn't amount to much yet, but we're

working at it. If we keep on and make enough noise maybe they'll hear us in Washington. The whole country will hear us, by God. That's about the only way to accomplish anything — to get together and shout." She smiled. "I can do some high-pressure shouting, Hilda."

"And what has it got you?" Guy asked with his lip curling over the rim of his glass.

"So far only the satisfaction of knowing that I'm not taking it lying down, Guy," Gussie said sharply. "That means a lot to me."

"Very good, Gussie," Hilda said, and Guy laughed and said carelessly: "O.K., Gussie. Here, I'll buy a drink."

Hilda had been watching the clock and at nine-thirty she said that she had to go home. "You stay here, Clay. I'll walk home alone." Guy was drunk and tried to detain her, reaching for her wrist and spilling a drink which Therese mopped up with a little clucking noise, chiding him gently. A flash of his smile and his deep dimples disposed of her annoyance and she was smiling and talking to him when Hilda left.

Clay came home very late. She awakened and heard him groping in the dark, falling against a chair. She sighed. "Oh, go ahead and turn on the light. I'm awake."

"Say." His face was flushed. "What's this about your looking for a job, Hilda? I don't want you to work, see. I'll do the working in this family." He fell into the chair and bent over to untie his shoes. "I'll get a job next week, you hear?" She saw that he was tight. "I'll be a cartoonist or something like that. I'll be the prostitute in this family, not you. See?"

"Oh, come to bed, Clay," Hilda said, concealing her smile. She turned her face to the wall and he stumbled to the closet for his pajamas, still talking. "Guy was drunk as hell tonight. Querulous and nasty like an old hag — got into a fight with Therese — said she'd faked his check. Hurt her feelings and she got sore and he walked out without paying and said he wouldn't come back. When I left he was outside in the street crying."

"Crying ?" Hilda said.

"Boo-hoo like a baby. Wanted to go on drinking and I wouldn't go with him and he staggered off somewhere, going boo-hoo like a baby." Clay fell on the bed beside her in a hot reek of liquor and almost at once was asleep.

The next morning, after Hilda had ridden uptown on top of a bus and was refreshed by the breeze of a cool spring day, she was waiting in an office, on a leather sofa, when an opaque glass door opened and it seemed that time fell away and she became very self-conscious, seeing him again ; she felt aware that she was pale and thin and that the lines of her face were sharper and more angular. His temples were somewhat grayer, it seemed, but he moved still in the precise, graceful manner that had been so carefully acquired. "Always walk with your feet on a line," he used to tell her. "It gives you carriage." They saw each other at the same instant, and for a moment he stood quite still in the doorway, looking at her, then he said in a soft voice that carried clearly across the room : "Hilda !" She got to her feet and he came to meet her, taking her hand. "After all this time," he said. "Where have you been ?"

She smiled, drawing her hand away, awkward and embarrassed with him as she had been in that virginal year when she had first met him, when she had deliberately selected him, because he was engaging and discreet, to be her lover, because she had felt she must vary a life which had seemed dull and immature.

"I waited for you to come back from Cannes," he said in a constrained, chiding tone. "What happened to you ? Why didn't I hear from you ?" He looked at her closely. "Well, never mind. Listen, let's go somewhere and talk. — What are you doing here ?"

"Looking for a job," Hilda said bluntly.

"Really ?" He paused. "Come into my office, Hilda."

He motioned to her and she went ahead of him to a door marked *A.E. LeVan, advertising manager*, saying over her shoulder : "I didn't know you were here, A.E. That isn't why I came here. I mean . . ."

"You mean you want a job on the merits?" He smiled. In the bright sunlight from a wide window he stood looking at her. "So, Hilda James again."

Hilda spread her hands, turning her face so the light would not fall full on it.

"I should be angry with you," he said.

"But it had to be broken off some time, A.E."

"Did it?" After an instant's hesitation he said: "You really want a job?"

"More than that. I need a job. — I used to model for Paul Nicolle, you remember."

"Of course I haven't forgotten that." When he smiled Hilda remembered the way his small moustache nestled against his nose. It was only that lifting of his upper lip that showed that he was Jewish. He offered her a cigarette, then a drink, and she refused both. He put her in a chair by the window and sat on the edge of the desk with his feet in gray suede shoes swinging. She had never noticed before that his hair was thin above his forehead, the definite encroachment of temporal baldness. He asked: "Hilda, have you ever sold?"

"No, I was always a model."

He looked briefly at the oval of her face, then said quietly: "We don't need any models, but if you want to sell . . ."

"Of course I want to sell."

"Then I can find a place for you."

"Oh, A.E., that's good of you. . . ."

"Not just for old time's sake, Hilda. This is business. I think you should be a good seller. You'll have to be."

"I will be."

"That's settled then. Beginning Monday. — Now, where have you been all this time?"

"I just came back from France."

He showed that he was piqued because she had left him and gone to Cannes, because she had never written. And because of this pique there was interest in his eyes; because of it he had offered her a job so readily, she was sure. He had never known much about her; she had not told him why she went to the south

of France that spring. She had always been reticent about herself with him, even with Clay.

“Where are you living, Hilda ?”

“On Jones Street.”

“In the Village ?” He wrinkled his nose. “You don’t belong in the Village, Hilda.” He hesitated, brushing his moustache with two fingers. “Listen, I’m angry with you.” His voice was that of an indulgent uncle. “Shall we have dinner some night — go to a night-club ?”

“Well . . .” She hesitated. “Later, A.E., when I’m settled.”

“Of course.”

“I’ve just moved. — I want to get used to the routine of selling.”

He smiled at her. “All right, Hilda. Come in on Monday and I’ll drop down to see how you’re getting along.”

She went out to the street with a great feeling of relief, with a sense of escape, and waited for a bus at the corner. Some time she would have to tell him that she was married. She laughed, remembering the bright lecherous look in his eyes contradicting the restraint that was so characteristic of him. She felt light-hearted now, not altogether because she had found a job, and she breathed deeply of the warm south wind as the bus travelled down the Avenue to Washington Square. It made her feel young and breathless, remembering him in Paris. And suddenly she laughed aloud as she thought of the second time they had gone out together. It had been cold and damp in Paris, a persistent penetrant chill, and she had worn woolen underwear, knee-length. She had not expected to meet him, but he was waiting in the Place des Voges when she left the school and later, after dinner, he had put one hand on her knee in the taxicab. Then her emotion had been shame and humiliation, fearing that he had noticed the underwear. He was so correct ; she had never asked him if he had.

She hurried across the park and through the streets of the city which always seemed self-conscious in its shirt-sleeves, and ran up the stairs. She found Clay at his easel beside the casement windows, beside the ochre yellow curtains which were the one ad-

dition she had made to the furnishings and which cast a faint glow of her favorite color on his white canvas. She took off her hat and tossed it on the divan and cried breathlessly : "Clay, how would it feel to have a regular income ?"

"I have no way of knowing."

"Yes you have, Clay. Now don't argue, please. I have a job."

He stared at her.

"Thirty a week, Clay. Thirty dollars a week!"

"But, Hilda, I told you. — I don't want you to work. You're not strong enough."

"Nonsense. I've always worked."

"But damn it, I'm going to get a job. We still have some money. I'll start looking on Monday. . . ."

"But until you get work, Clay. — It's a swell opportunity. I'm to sell, not to model. There's a future in it, Clay. I'll get to be a buyer. I'll make lots of money. You don't care if I have a career, do you ?"

"Of course not."

"Well, then ? — Clay, let's go out and celebrate."

"But I don't think you ought to work yet, Hilda. Seriously."

"There's a bottle of Scotch here. I'll fix some drinks. Clay, do you suppose we could get theatre tickets ? It's not too late. Look in the paper, will you ?"

Clay began to put his brushes away, frowning, but pleased to see her so enthusiastic, and she laughed and ran to the kitchen for the bottle. Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror she saw with excitement that now she did look "radiant and breathless, sort of," and she pirouetted back to Clay with the bottle. He grinned sourly. "Think you're pretty damn cute, don't you ? — supporting the family."

otone of women's voices continuing steady and shrill without the relief of any change of pitch. She sighed and pressed her hands to her forehead, feeling somewhat stronger now, but not yet ready to sit up and subject her head to the dizzy whirl that had sent her staggering, suddenly to fall in a faint against a rack of dresses. There had been a sharp pain in her side and now she felt the soreness there, sensing that a sudden movement would cause acute pain.

The curtains moved aside and the Irish floorwalker put his head in and grinned at her. "Feel better?"

"I'm all right."

"Well, you just lie there a while. Stay there until closing time. Don't come out where anyone can take a look at you, understand?"

"Yes."

"You can rest up over Sunday and you'll be all right."

"Thank you very much," Hilda said. His name was Dennis O'Leary and he had been there when she fainted ; he had picked her up from the heap of dresses. There was a hospital room in the store but he had not taken her there. Instead he had carried her into the dressing room, so that no one would know of her illness. From the first day he had been kind. On that first day Hilda had been exhausted ; by noon her feet were sore and the muscles of her calves were aching. It had been an effort to control her nerves, to nurse her patience through the long hours, and at luncheon there had been no relief. There was no relief in lunching in a crowded drug store, waiting for a stool to sit on, elbowed by quick, sweaty women. She had limped back to the store, with the set smile aching on her face, and in the afternoon she had seen him watching her with a frown on his pink face. Later he walked over to her. "You're new here?"

"Yes, I started today."

"Listen, you oughtn't to wear high-heeled shoes. You'll ruin your feet. You won't be able to stand it."

"Oh," she had said. "Thank you."

"That's all right. Tomorrow you wear something sensible."

It had been nearly unendurable ; the stifling subways, the

weary hours of forced good humor, of smiles retained with petulant customers, of disappointments after showing many dresses. The second day she had worn low-heeled oxfords and her feet had not hurt so much ; she had been stronger. But each night she went home exhausted. Clay had been considerate. He marketed and cooked their dinner, would not even let her help with the dishes. He had started a picture he wanted to finish, the contrast of a canary yellow lunch wagon with the gaunt blank wall of a tall warehouse, and had not yet looked for a job. She did not urge him to. In the evenings they went often to the Vardo. Gussie Norton would be there, drinking little, and Guy Hart always with a Scotch and soda in his hand. There were others, among them several painters whose work Clay liked, and Hilda listened to aimless discussions that lasted for hours, with Guy becoming more argumentative, more opinionated, more dictatorial. "The problem is to work out your life as an individual," he would say with his lower lip thrust out, "to preserve your identity in an age of increasing regimentation." He would cling so dearly, so pathetically, to the shreds of his independence that Clay would never argue with him, instead would sit silent over a beer listening with a half-smile while Guy talked. There were usually several people grouped around their table, artists with whom Clay talked shop, and through one of them Clay arranged to do some black and white for a left-wing magazine. He worked hard on the drawings and it pleased Hilda, who sensed that Clay was jealous of her ability to look out for herself. They were planning an artists' union, and Clay was interested in it, and the only time she saw him impatient with Guy was when Guy would break in imperiously upon the conversation to change it in some way that would express his own ego and restore him from isolation. Each night Guy caused some scene. He would argue with Therese about his bill, because she charged him for drinks he had spilled, and once he became angry with Gussie and taunted her until she threw a glass of beer in his face, quite calmly and afterwards laughing. But Guy staggered out into the street with tears in his eyes and later Gussie walked home with Clay and Hilda. She came upstairs with them and stayed so late

that she decided to sleep on the floor, saying : "What the hell, Hilda, I've slept on park benches — right in Sheridan Square, in fact. For two nights, before I got this relief job. — Not because I was tight, either, don't think that." She laughed and lay back with her arms over her head and her great soft body flat on the floor, and as she snored that night Hilda could see her white form in the moonlight and she lay awake for a long time. She remembered Gussie in Paris, carefree, gregarious, shifting casually among an ever-changing group of people. To be unemployed then meant a few weeks of leisure, of heavy drinking, before she looked for another job, and there were always jobs for her. There could never be anything sordid about Gussie, even when she lived in small untidy rooms on evil streets, or even sleeping on park benches, but now she was pathetic ; her bovine good humor was so clearly insufficient. She had gone to Paris in the first few years after the war, and she had lived there ten years. Hilda thought of her life that night in the moonlight and now as she lay on the couch in the airless dressing room, she thought again of Gussie, thinking that Gussie had more courage than she. Hilda had been working only two weeks and now she was exhausted, hanging on with a grim tenacity. She felt that she was more serious than Gussie had been, more intent upon what she was doing. But Gussie had been forced to overcome her natural disposition, had adapted herself without losing her perspective, without losing her great good humor. Many women of Gussie's temperament, able to land on their feet like cats and confident of their ability to do so, would spend their lives in exploiting this advantage, and Gussie might have done so. Instead she worked on a relief job ; she joined a union and turned her fund of energy and patience toward something she believed in, toward a better life. Lying on the narrow couch, Hilda felt lost. She felt that America was too vast for her ; she could not contact it. She was tossed aimlessly in the life stream with no idea of her course and she wanted desperately to find something to work for. Not just for money. That meant being shrewd and cautious and politic and being nice to A.E. It had been embarrassing when he came to take her out to dinner. She had explained to Clay, so carefully,

that she had known A.E. a long time ago. An old beau of hers, she said, and she had gotten the job through him. She had not told him she was married. Just this once she had to go to dinner with him and she would tell him. But it was better, she said, for Clay not to be in the apartment when he called. "Not that it really makes any difference," she had said, "but why spoil his evening?" Clay had laughed, and uncomplaining and unsuspecting, he had gone to dinner with Guy Hart, and it had been rather trying for Hilda. A.E. spent a good deal of money — dinner, the theatre and a night-club — and she wouldn't let him kiss her in the taxicab afterwards. He had only smiled ; he was waiting until they got home, and he paid off the taxicab in Jones Street. They stood on the stoop and talked and Hilda kept saying "shush" because his voice was too loud. She wouldn't let him come inside and it was plain that his vanity was hurt. Finally she let him kiss her and shut the door in his face and ran up the stairs wiping the back of her hand roughly across her lips. She had felt like a bitch as she opened the door to the apartment. Clay was awake, but he only laughed and said : "Well, did he make a pass at you on the stairs?" Hilda loved him very much then ; she didn't know whether it was because she thought he was broad-minded or because she thought he trusted her. And lying beside him she knew that she would never get to be a buyer. The next day she changed the names on the door-bell, typing "James" and "Hall" separately on a slip of paper to insert in the space above the bell. And on Sunday A.E. called, bringing her flowers, a little bush in a pot with gardenias growing. Clay answered the door in his shirt-sleeves and Hilda introduced them : "Mr. LeVan — Mr. Hall," and they sat for a while in polite conversation, with A.E. glancing often at Clay and obviously intent on out-staying him. In some way it was mentioned that Clay was from Texas and A.E. asked : "Visiting New York?" Clay said : "Yes, I suppose so." And A.E. asked with a polite, bored lift of his eyebrows, with a dead-pan social look : "Where are you stopping?" He opened his mouth several times like a fish when Clay said quietly : "As a matter of fact, I'm staying

here." Hilda laughed in spite of herself at the sight of A.E.'s painfully red face. "Oh, A.E., we're married. This is my husband, don't you see?" When he had gone Hilda knew that he would never forgive her. And Clay, with his back turned, snipped a gardenia off the bush and put it in his buttonhole. "So that's the man, Hilda," he said. "What man?" "The man who brought us together. That's he, isn't it?" "Don't be silly, Clay. — I thought that was a closed subject." She watched him with her fists clenched until her nails hurt her palms. And when he did not speak of it again she lay back on the bed with her eyes closed, hardly breathing. And A.E. did not come down to her floor to see her that next week, and at home Clay was more silent than usual and she wished he would speak of it again so that they could talk the whole thing over.

Every morning she was tired, almost unable to get out of bed. She felt then that she was only existing ; up at seven in the morning when the alarm clock sounded, hastily breakfasting, by crowded subway to the store, and then long hours of patient, wearing labor and home again with no more purpose than a docile draught horse. There was not even a sense of service in selling clothes to empty-headed women who posed their figures, short and dumpy or panther-lean, awkward as turkeys and shapeless as sawdust stuffed in skin, before the large mirrors in the store. What unnatural shapes a woman's figure could assume when the pressure of undisciplined living ruptured nature's lines in a hundred places. Bodies did not require symmetry to be beautiful, Hilda thought ; an ungainly figure could be beautiful if there was character in it. A knobby elbow could express a fine clear intelligence ; a skinny leg could emphasize the triumph of man's mind, his rise so far above the animal. But she had seen enough of bodies as shapeless as the minds that directed them, of faces smooth and classical but with lines of petulance and discontent. One of these had been assigned to her that afternoon, a young girl shopping for a trousseau, and countless dresses Hilda had taken from the racks for a brief and critical inspection which seemed to include Hilda in the definite pronouncement : "Oh, God, that

won't do." When after forty minutes she had gone away undecided, buying nothing, Hilda had slumped against the rack of clothes and fainted into them.

A bell jangled and she sat upright, and as she did so there was a sharp strain of pain. She was on her feet, arranging her hair before the mirror, when O'Leary returned. He stood at the doorway a moment, hesitating.

"I feel all right now," Hilda said. "Thank you, Mr. O'Leary. I'll be rested by Monday."

O'Leary smiled from the side of his mouth. "You won't be here Monday, Miss James. You're having a week's vacation." "Vacation!"

"That's what they call it. — A lay-off, Miss James."

"Oh," Hilda said. "Is it because . . . ?"

"No. Oh, not at all. We've been giving vacations for some time. It's the policy of the store, you see. Those with the lowest sales, or those who are the newest to the force, are the ones let go. If you get your sales high enough and keep them there it won't happen, maybe."

Hilda silently began to put on her hat, pulling it down over one eye.

"One girl has had six weeks' vacation since the first of the year," O'Leary said. "Another has been working part-time for the past four years — never knows when she'll be called in, and doesn't dare leave her house. Waits there for the telephone." He sat down on the one small chair in the dressing room. "It's a hell of a thing. I don't know how some of them get along."

"Is the store losing money?"

"It ain't in the red, but it ain't showing much profit, I guess. Been passing dividends on the stock, and that won't do." His voice became slightly falsetto. "That won't do, you know."

"But a week from Monday — do I come back then?" Hilda turned her pale face to him.

"Unless you get a telegram. — They may extend your vacation. I might as well tell you that. In that case they'll send you a telegram not to come in."

"I hadn't expected this," Hilda said, spreading her hands in a helpless gesture.

"There's no telling when to expect it. You know —" He looked up at her. "We have to stand for a lot. We have to sit and take it. You can't fight back. You just have to sit home and wait for a telegram and hope to hell it doesn't come. Sometimes they're sent out as late as Sunday night, telling you not to come to work the next day." He kept his eyes on her face. "I should think you girls would join the union."

"The union? I never thought of that. *Is* there a union?"

"Of course. — But it's a hell of a job organizing women. Most of them want to get married some day and don't give a damn, and others are so scared of losing their jobs they don't dare. — And if they just get their feet planted on one little stepping stone, no matter how small and insecure, they say to hell with the people on the bank behind them and to hell with the water down below. It's a tough job to organize women, all right."

"Where is this union?" Hilda asked quickly.

He gave her a strange steady look and Hilda said, "Oh," weakly and turned away, flushing. O'Leary put his head back and laughed. "I'm no spy. Don't be frightened. — But I don't blame you. That's the right idea. You do have to be careful. There are plenty of stools in a big store like this. Be careful who you talk to, and be sure." He paused. "I hope you don't get a telegram, Miss James."

"Oh, to hell with their telegrams," Hilda said, and when she left the dressing room she felt a warm glow that made her forget her fatigue and the persistent pain as she went down the escalator and out the employees' entrance into the sticky spring air. Now she felt that she knew what she wanted ; she believed she would be able to free herself of the sense of aimlessness, of submersion in a ~~vig~~rant stream of humanity. She had been looking for some direction for herself, not for security alone. Merely to work, to achieve a personal independence, no matter how illusionary, at first had seemed enough, but now she felt that she must work for

something ; there must be some tangible achievement, not the brief satisfaction of selling a machine-made dress to a vain woman. This impulse of service could find no outlet in selling clothes in a Fifth Avenue store. She was a middle-class girl who normally would satisfy this need in marriage, in children, Hilda thought, but she felt that the emotional pleasures of such a life would not content her. For a long time she had felt drawn toward some shadowy objective ; everything that had happened in her life for so long, everything she had seen to intensify the sense of purposelessness that oppressed her generation, had turned her definitely from a desire for personal escape. She felt indignation on a universal scale, not personally ; she wanted to help those who were dependent and helpless, who trembled when the telephone rang and turned pale at the sight of a Western Union boy. She wanted them to fight, and she would fight with them, she thought. She walked very quickly to the subway, submitted to the indignity of bodies crushed against her, and emerged hot and with her hat pushed out of place at the Christopher Street Station. With dragging steps she climbed the stairs to their apartment, and on the landing she clutched the bannister suddenly and fell against it, and for a dizzy blue-black moment she hung in balance, about to fall. Her limbs moved with a dream-like heaviness ; she swayed as she pulled herself up the stairs with both hands on the stair-rail, her handbag falling unheeded to the step. Her weight fell against the door and it flew open and she saw Clay's startled face. She steadied herself against the door jamb as he came toward her, saying through clenched teeth : "Oh God, Clay, I'm sick."

v

It was typical of Clay, Hilda thought, to be so engrossed in the study of the architectural lines of the hatchet-shaped headdress of a Mangbettu woman of the Belgian Congo in an illustrated magazine that he had forgotten all about her. She had come from the doctor's office to seek the solace of his sympathy and protection and she found him waiting in the anteroom entirely forgetful of his surroundings or why he was there. Her face flushed with

annoyance as she reached over to touch his arm to get his attention. At once he was on his feet, saying : "Well?" But she shook her head and walked past him toward the elevator.

"When we get outside," she said over her shoulder, and she stood in silence in the elevator watching the floors tick off in electric lights on the indicator. Gussie Norton had recommended the doctor to her, and it had been an unhappy half-hour in his office. He was a young man with a quiet, fading manner ; on the walls of his office incongruously were hung prints and etchings of hard-running polo ponies, of brawny sporting events ; above the fireplace a mounted fish had gaped at her.

There was a crowd in the lobby of the building and they went on out to Madison Avenue. She held tightly to his arm with both her hands as they walked to the bus, and at last she said : "There has to be an operation, Clay. I knew it would be something like that."

He stopped short and a busy, stocky man bumped into him and passed on, muttering viciously under his breath. Clay held her arm. "What's the matter, Hilda?"

"Oh, I don't know. Some sort of growth — a tumor or something."

"I suppose it dates back to Madame Jouvert."

"Yes."

"If I'd had any sense I'd never have let you go to her," he said savagely. "If I'd loved you then . . . Well, tell me the worst. Is it serious? What did he say?"

"It's expensive."

"We can raise the money. What did he say, Hilda?"

"It's a simple operation. There's nothing to worry about. Come on." They crossed Fifth Avenue with the green light and went to the bus stop. "But it must be done, he said."

"Of course. When?"

"Just when I had a job, too. Just when we were beginning to get settled, Clay." She did not want to talk too much about it.

He signalled a bus and they sat on the top deck. Then she told him quietly : "He reserved the operating room for tomorrow morning, Clay."

"Tomorrow!" He looked at her closely. "Hilda, what *did* he say?"

"That's all, really. He said it had to be done and I thought it was best to get it over with immediately. Why wait and worry about it, Clay? I'm to go to the hospital tonight and be ready for the morning."

"Hilda, you haven't lied to me? — I should have talked to him."

"No, I've told you everything." Her hands were both clasped on his arm and she looked away. She felt sheltered by his concern.

When they got off the bus they stopped at a bar on Eighth Street for a cocktail and then, walking back to Jones Street, the fatigue came over her again and when they were at home she sank to the divan. The stimulus, the vibrant enthusiasm that she had the day before was now negated. That afternoon she lounged around the apartment, reading the afternoon papers. Clay tried to paint; he began a sketch of her as she sat in sunlight by the window. It made her nervous and at last she cried: "Clay, this isn't your last chance to paint me. I'll be here again." He came over and sat beside her, soothing her, and she said: "It will take about all the money we have left, Clay. That's what worries me."

"I'll find something to do."

"But I was well established as the family breadwinner. I was beginning to see where we were going. Oh, damn, now we're more helpless than we were before."

Clay turned to the window to look out at the street, feeling pent-up and confined in the small apartment, feeling a sense of isolation that was disturbing, and a deep uneasiness. Hilda was nervous and after a while he heard her sobbing on the divan. "What's the matter, Hilda? Now don't be frightened."

"I'm not." She pressed her face full into the pillow. "Oh, I don't know, Clay. I feel that everything has slipped out from under my fingers. I don't know what to do."

"When this is over we'll straighten things out."

"I hope so."

"Listen, what we need is a drink. I'll go out for a bottle of Scotch."

"No. — I have to go to the hospital after dinner." She sat up. "At least I can pack my bag now. I'll be ready." She went to the bathroom and spread cold cream on her face and wiped off with it the stains of her tears. She packed a small overnight bag and they took it with them to a restaurant. They each had a cocktail and they drank a bottle of red wine together in an Italian restaurant on Thompson Street where the walls were mustard-colored and the tables smelled of tomato sauce. Hilda still could not help thinking with resentment of the week's lay-off from the store and after a long silence, while they were lingering over cups of strong, chickory-mixed black coffee, she said : "Clay, there's no reason why you shouldn't make a lot of money. You're a good artist. You're clever. Why don't you try commercial work ?"

"Sure, but we'll worry about money when this is over with. How about some brandy ?"

"But, Clay . . ." Her voice trailed off and she moved her shoulders wearily. "Oh, all right, let's have a brandy."

Going downtown in a taxicab she sat holding his hand. The hospital was near South Street and they heard deep, hollow whistles from the river. It was a foggy night, and in Hilda's room on the fourth floor of the old building they could still hear the whistles. They sat by the open window and talked for a few minutes before the nurse sent Clay away. Hilda smiled, but her face was pale and as the door closed upon her when he left he remembered the closing door in Madame Jouvert's apartment in Toulon ; he remembered the squat figure of the midwife in her rustling black dress. Clay stopped in a barroom at the corner under the el, but when he was standing at the bar he decided that he did not want a drink and ordered only a beer. Then he walked up Broad Street and past the deserted corner by the sub-treasury building into Nassau Street. The Wall Street section was quiet, but lights winked high in the skyscrapers. The vastness, the sharp hard dominance of the buildings, depressed Clay and he walked quickly the length of narrow Nassau Street and emerged

with relief at Park Row. He went across City Hall Plaza, past the show-windows of ornate ecclesiastical garments on Park Place, and took the subway home.

The next morning he was awakened by the telephone and a crisp secretarial voice told him it was Dr. Wilson's office. His stomach turned over with sudden anxiety and he was almost grateful to learn that the doctor was only anxious about his money. "The fee will be a hundred and fifty dollars, Mr. Hall," the secretary said, "and there's the additional ten dollar charge for the anaesthetist. It's the custom to receive payment in advance."

"Oh," Clay said.

"Dr. Wilson would like you to make the arrangements before the operation."

"I'll give you a check this morning," Clay said coldly, and hung up. He went to the bathroom and in the hot shower his heart pounded angrily. Lucky he did have the money, he thought, lucky he had the Senator to call on if worst came to worst. When he shaved he found that his hands were trembling. He was not hungry and he went without breakfast, took the subway to South Ferry and walked along South Street to the hospital. The doctor met him in a small waiting room and Clay made out a check at a desk by the window, which faced on a gray court. They had two hundred dollars left in the bank then and Clay sat alone with the checkbook in his hands looking out at a blank gray wall across the court. He knew that now he must act quickly. His life had always been casual, impractical, and he was confused. He did not know where to begin. He wished he were more aggressive, more self-confident, but until the last he was unable to face reality. He dreamed of living quietly with Hilda, in the country, where he could paint ; he dreamed of an ideal existence, with no clear thoughts about the present. He had never worked in his life. Money had been his self-confidence, and without it he was helpless. He thought with admiration of Hilda's courage, her sureness, and he was acutely aware of the fact that she had been forced into the position of goading him, to bolster his

initiative. Because of her courage he had taken casually the fact of her illness, but now as he waited in the tiny dark room he was terribly afraid. He became almost panicky, and got up to walk up and down on the carpet, kneading his hands together. But half an hour later, after a matronly nurse had told him that it was all over and that there was no danger, there was hardly any memory of his fear. He went out into the sunlight, into South Street ringing with the clatter of draught horses. He walked very quickly toward the Battery, in relief that was like excitement, that made his blood beat fast. And riding uptown on the subway he stood on the platform watching the spaced single lights flash by and muttering through his teeth into the roar of the train : "Thank Jesus."

There was a letter in the mailbox and Clay recognized Olivia's writing. He sat by the window to read it. It was in Olivia's hand, but after the salutation was the bracketed statement : *dictated by Papa.*

Dear Clay, the letter said, *I have stocked the ranch again with four hundred white-faced Herefords and we are looking forward to a good year for the cattleman. The price of beef is improving after these several years of a poor market. I suggest, and your aunt concurs with me, that you return to Texas with your wife and manage the ranch for me. You know enough about ranch work, with me to advise you as to details, to make a success of it. Please let me know your decision at once.* That was all from his grandfather, but there were several paragraphs from Olivia, ending with *Why don't you come home, Clay? You've been away too many years.* He turned the letter over and over in his hands, looking out at the noisy street, and he knew that this was the solution. After four years surely his relations with his grandfather would be changed. He would be able to assert himself, to preserve his independence. Yes, they would go to Texas. He could hardly wait to tell Hilda. He remembered all the associations of his youth and he was excited. He remembered the long roll of the hills, the smell of saddle-leather and cactus and sage ; he remembered the wailing of coyotes in the night, the still

swift flight of buzzards, the lowing of cattle at the water tanks ; he remembered soft southern voices, friendly voices. Yes, they would go back to Texas.

He did not see Hilda until the next morning, when he found her pale, but cheerful. All the color seemed to have been washed from her skin, which was lifeless against the brilliance of her hair. He brought a chair beside the bed. "Everything is solved," he said.

"You have a job ?"

"No. Listen." He took out Olivia's letter and read it to her. Then he looked up anxiously. "Well ?"

"Well ?" She smiled.

"Do you want to go to Texas ?"

"We've got to do something, Clay."

"He really wants me there. It's practically an order. I think you'd like Texas, Hilda."

"Maybe. Yes, I think I would."

"We might be down there a long time. We might never get away, once we go. Could you stand it ?"

"We have to live somewhere, Clay. Why not Texas ?"

"Yes, why not Texas ? — It is an amazing place. It takes hold of your imagination. It always has, since Sam Houston and Davy Crockett and the rest snatched it away from Mexico. It's been sort of a promised land. The Texas native sons are more passionate than California's, even. They tell you it's the biggest state and the biggest cattle producer. It raises more cotton than any other state, and millions of dollars of oil pour out of the ground every day. And it's beautiful, wild country. — It would be fine to ride in the sun and watch cattle grow fat, watch wheat crops mature and cotton puff white, wouldn't it ? — Back to the land, Hilda."

"Yes, back to the land. Let's do it, Clay."

He nodded, turning the letter over in his hands.

"Does it seem like defeat, Clay, to go back to your grandfather ? If it does"

"No, I don't feel defeated. And there isn't much choice." He frowned, then shook his head with a brief smile. "Oh, it's

the best thing to do. We'll settle down there, Hilda, raise a family. How about it?"

"Do you care much about raising a family?"

He looked at her for a long time before he answered, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Not particularly."

"Because it's too late, Clay," she said. She bit her lip. "I can't have a baby. — Do you mind?"

"I could tell you were keeping something from me the other day. I knew it." He realized that she had been concerned about his reaction, and he leaned over and put his arm around her; he kissed her troubled eyes. "I don't care. It doesn't make any difference to me. But I'm sorry for your sake, Hilda." Her fingers pressed his and he said quietly: "If we feel we have to have a child we can adopt one some day, can't we?"

"Yes," Hilda said in a small voice.

"There are enough babies brought into this world as it is," he said. "We'll help some poor kid who's already in it."

They did not speak of it again. The next day their talk was all of Texas. Hilda was excited. She had become eager, and Clay wrote to Olivia to say that they were coming. In the next few days, while Hilda was at the hospital, he packed their trunks and rolled up his paintings and stowed them in the crates in which he had brought them from France. Time went by very swiftly and when all the bills had been paid, when they had bought the tickets, they had only fifty dollars left. Clay laughed about it, saying: "Money will mean nothing to us once we get there."

On the day they went away Clay walked around to see Guy Hart. He was living in a furnished room on Christopher Street, with the grating noise of streetcars outside. It was nearly noon but Guy was still in bed. There were puffs of flesh under his eyes and his cheeks sagged as he sat up in bed and smoked a cigarette. "Damn it, Clay. I didn't know you were leaving so soon. Why didn't you tell me?" Guy went into the bathroom and threw water on his face. There was a bottle of cheap rye on the table and he poured himself a drink. "Christ, Clay, I'll miss you." He looked at Clay and his lower lip trembled a

little. "I'm lonely. I'm lonely as hell. It's damned near psychopathic."

"You've got a hang-over," Clay said.

"I drink because I'm lonely. It's agony. I can't get away from it. I have to drink." Guy knotted the cords of his dressing gown around him and sat on the edge of the sagging bed. "Clay, you won't like Texas. You're urban, don't you know that?"

"I was born in Texas, Guy — raised on a ranch."

"But damn it, that was before you matured. You won't be able to stand it." Clay had never known Guy to let his emotions show so definitely. His hand trembled as he held the glass and he had trouble putting the cigarette between his lips. "Listen, Clay. God damn it, listen to me." Guy drank the rest of the whisky. "Stay around a while longer. Let's go back to Paris, what do you say?"

"I haven't any money, Guy."

Guy dropped the glass on the floor. "Neither have I." He stood up. "You didn't know that, did you? I'm hard up, Clay. I've got to find something to do. Gussie's going to help me get on the W.P.A. Christ, I can't do anything. I haven't worked since I was twenty-one. Clay, I'm God damned near the end of my rope."

"The best thing you can do is sober up," Clay said, feeling the insufficiency of the words, and he thought that he had spoken them like a Y.M.C.A. secretary. "What I mean is you'll feel better about it when you sober up," he said.

"Jesus, I've got to drink." Guy reached out and caught Clay's hand; he clung to it. "Clay, I'm in a terrible state. I know it. It's psychopathic. I don't know what the hell to do. I'm not young any more. I can't find anybody to support me. Jesus, I've lost my charm." Clay took his hand away and Guy picked up the glass from the floor and poured himself another drink. "Listen, Clay, I went to a Turkish bath and I was talking to a boy there and he called a cop. They took me to court, and I was in a cage and thickheaded, extrovert, ambivalent, bastardly Irish cops were calling me names and pretending to camp. Jesus,

Clay, I never camped. And the magistrate heard the case in chambers. The kid didn't appear to sign the complaint and he let me go. But they treated me like dirt, Clay. God damn this country. God damn America. I want to go back to France, to a civilized country. Americans are primitive, brutish people, Clay. I can't stand it, I tell you. Just to walk along the street I feel like a Jew in a pogrom." He looked at Clay, his face highly flushed. "I didn't mean to take my hair down, but it never got me like this before. I always found beauty in life, Clay — youth, animation, the healthy animal flush on young bodies, the sweetness, the trustfulness of young minds — Christ, Clay, am I a disgusting old pederast? Am I disgusting?" He did not wait for Clay to speak. "In France you can live like a human being. You don't have to skulk about in Turkish baths. God damned if I'm going to walk along the street and have wop kids shout 'yoo-hoo' at me, and let a bastard of an Irish cop take any obscene liberty he pleases because I'm different." Guy began to sob. He put his head in his hands, ran his now damp palms over his face. "Oh, I'm just drunk," he said. "Clay, hand me that bottle." Clay passed the bottle over and again Guy caught his hand. "Clay, don't go to Texas. That won't do you any good. You ought to stay in New York. I'll be lonely without you. I mean that. — Clay, don't you *ever* let yourself go?" Guy raised his puffy eyes to Clay's face, then looked away. "I guess I am drunk, all right. Clay, you've been a good friend to me." He threw himself back on the bed. "Forget it, will you?" He sat up again, got to his feet and went to the gas refrigerator behind a screen in a corner of the room for ice cubes. "Hell, Clay, let's have a farewell drink."

"All right," Clay said. He felt very depressed, and he sat sipping the whisky in the airless, shaded room without feeling any effect from it.

"I'm going to pull myself together," Guy said. "I'm going to get down to work. I've got to get a job first, though. Clay, forget about all this, will you?"

"Sure."

"I'm going to pull myself together. God, I'm old enough to

stop acting like a morbid minor poet. I ought to have my life organized by this time. I ought to know where I'm going and what I'm about. — Clay, what time does your train leave?"

"At six-five this afternoon. I've got to go home and finish packing pretty soon, Guy."

"I wish we were both back in La Pramousel," Guy said, "drinking white wine with Père Ugobon. Clay, we were damned fools to come back to America."

"Maybe so."

"Europe is the only place to live." Guy shook his head sadly, and his unsteady hand reached out for the bottle. Clay stood up. "Where are you going?"

"I have to leave, Guy."

"No. Stay around. Have another drink."

"Really, I haven't much time."

"But I won't see you again for a hell of a while. You're the best friend I've got. Jesus, why do all the fine young men get married?" Guy smiled, but his dimples faded almost immediately in his gray cheeks. He looked up at Clay, who was on his feet now. "You don't have to go yet."

"Yes."

"Goodbye then." Guy clipped the words short, his voice high and shrewish.

"Goodbye, Guy."

"Wait. Say, write to me. What's your address?"

"Just Briar Forks, Texas."

"That sounds a long way off. Briar Forks, Texas. That sounds to hell and gone." Clay walked slowly to the door and Guy jumped up and followed him. Clay opened the door and was standing in the hall when he said goodbye again. Guy shook his hand, but did not cling to it this time, and after Clay had gone, after he had closed the door, Guy leaned against it with a sick feeling, with self-revulsion because Clay had retreated from him so plainly. He went back to his glass and poured more whisky in it. His head no longer throbbed, but there was a hot, choking sensation, like a collar much too tight. All he could think of was the years gone by ; he tried to recapture the feeling

of them. He tried to close his mind to the present, to remember swift, thoughtless nights in Berlin, warm nostalgic days in the south of France. But insistently there intruded immediate memories : the beefy face of a policeman in Jefferson Market Court, the numerals on the collar of his blue coat, his leering self-sure manner. He remembered obscene jokes that made him writhe. "You son-of-a-bitch," the cop said. "I wouldn't give you the satisfaction of a goose." "Of course I understand it's maldistribution of the hormones," the magistrate said. "You're a medical case. People like you ought to be put away, for your own good and for the good of society. If there were a complaint I'd send you out to Welfare Island. They segregate your kind there. Say, they tell me there's always a favorite, a queen of the jail. They let 'em do as they please there. How would you like to go to Welfare Island ?" Laughter and a wink at the bailiff. "You could be the dowager queen of the Island." Guy had not opened his mouth. "Sometimes they're brought in and all the clothes they have are women's gowns. They don't look so cute in the prison suits, I guess. Well, case dismissed, but you stay away from Turkish baths and be careful how you act. And if they ever catch you hanging around the men's room in the subway . . ." Guy gulped more of the whisky, choking on it, and was nearly nauseated. He sat on the edge of the bed taking deep full breaths to still the writhing of his stomach. He thought that everyone needed someone in whom to reflect his nature truly. For him Clay had been the mirror of his real self ; never before had he disturbed their relationship, and again he felt the anguish of self-disgust as he wondered what Clay had thought. There had seemed a finality in their parting which made more definite the present separation of his life, the future from the past. He swallowed the rest of the rye into his inflamed stomach and staggered toward the refrigerator for more ice cubes. The refrigerator and the stove were a unit and he stood looking at the gas jets. He turned on the gas in one of the jets and sniffed the sweetish-sickly odor. He did not intend to commit suicide ; he only wanted to think of it as a morbid counter to his unhappiness. He turned on all the jets, then sneered at his own dramati-

zation of himself, with a short bitter laugh. But he left the gas turned on and went and sat in a chair, looking at the stove. Now it made no particular difference to him whether he turned the gas off or not. "It's a matter of complete indifference," he said aloud in a rather stilted voice. He drank more whisky and looked at the stove which soundlessly was pouring gas into the room. He had not stuffed the cracks in the doors ; possibly a window was open. There was no danger. The smell of the gas now reached him very strongly, and he wrinkled his nose. But it was not unpleasant, not enough so to stir him to rise and go over to the stove. He sat there for a long time with the empty glass in his hands. His head throbbed from all the whisky he had drunk, and he became drowsy. His eyes closed, and his chin sank to his chest as he dozed.

He awakened with a start in sharp discomfort, with aching lungs and in a moment's daze before he remembered the gas-filled room he thought of a young pianist who had attempted suicide by gas in Paris. They had revived him and for days he had lain in a hospital bed with saline solution flowing drop by drop into his veins from a tank overhead. In a sudden panic Guy pushed himself to his feet. He was dizzy and he swayed against the table. He went forward toward the stove and he walked into sudden flaming noise. . .

On the way uptown they heard newsboys shouting "extra," and as they were following the redcap through the vaulted Pennsylvania Station they passed a newsstand and Clay bought a paper. There was a fudge in a box at the bottom left-hand corner of the pink paper : *Gas Explosion in Village*. He merely glanced at the accompanying paragraph.

"What is it ?" Hilda asked.

"Side of a house blown out on Christopher Street by an explosion," Clay said. Then he had to fumble for his tickets to be examined at the gate and there was the confusion of being settled in their compartment. He did not look at the newspaper again, and it was not until he received a letter from Gussie a week later that he knew of Guy's death.

He sat watching the marsh-lands of New Jersey, later the

mountains, then the hogs of the mid-west. Hilda was still convalescent and she slept a good deal on the journey. After Saint Louis Clay felt a mounting excitement. It was nearly night when they left Saint Louis, and it was dark as they rolled into Arkansas. Hilda went to bed early and he sat in the smoking compartment. The conductor told him that they would reach Texarkana early in the morning and later he drew back the curtains and put his head in Hilda's berth, calling her name.

"What is it, Clay? I was asleep."

"We get to Texas early in the morning." He stood in the swaying corridor, smiling at her.

"Did you wake me up to tell me that? — Clay, you're very excited about it, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. I really am. I want to see Texas again."

Clay went to bed, but lay awake in the train berth, watching the fleeting night landscape, the unreal glimpses of midnight trees, of water touched with ghostly moonlight, in the White River region of Arkansas. He listened to the hollow rumble as the train rushed across a trestle and looked out at trees black as cypress overhanging water a milk-yellow hue in the moonlight. Now he was able to forget the sense of failure and uncertainty, and he looked out with nostalgia at the moonlit trees and luminous water and thought of the broad plains of Texas and the crystal stars and the clear bright air he had not breathed for so long.

VI

TEXAS was very green that spring; the plains had never seemed so bright to Clay as he looked at them from the window of the Texas and Pacific train, nor to Olivia as she drove to the station that morning to meet him. She was early, and after she had parked the car she walked up and down on the platform, nervously, with little short steps. The road beyond the tracks was hard and white, but not yet dusty, and the hills were green beyond; the foliage of the plane trees along the road hung heavy on the boughs and stirred gently in the morning breeze. Olivia in her purple dress stood against the bright yellow wall of the

station and Clay's eyes caught the color harmony as he looked out the window of the approaching train. A few moments later he and Hilda stood amid their luggage on the platform and Olivia came toward them, dropping her handbag as she reached for Clay's hands, and then in confusion as they all bent to pick it up.

"Clay, my boy, you're home at last. Let me look at you. Why, you haven't changed a bit, not a bit."

"This is Hilda, Aunt Olivia."

Olivia put out her gloved hand and Hilda looked into eyes of cobalt blue, heard the drawling voice surprisingly soft coming from the trim, austere face : "Clay didn't write you were so beautiful, Hilda."

"Where's the Senator, Aunt Olivia ?"

"Oh — he's waiting at home, Clay. He didn't feel like coming to the station. — Hilda, it makes me happy to welcome Clay's wife to Rutherford."

Hilda returned the pressure of Olivia's fingers as they walked together along the platform, Clay following with the suitcases. "I hope you'll like Texas. It isn't Paris, or New York. It isn't very gay, and I hope you can endure the heat. This has been the finest spring since I can remember. I'm glad you're seeing it that way. — Clay, put those bags in the back seat, and you can drive. I expect you remember the way home, don't you ?"

"Sure do."

"Look around you, Clay. Has it changed any ? Isn't it just the same it always was, and more so that you're home again. — Speak to Oscar Hammond, Clay."

The station master, with gold-lettered cap on the back of his head, shook Clay's hand, saying : "Well, Clay, I remember when I put you on the train to go away. How long ago was that ?"

"Four years."

"As long as that ? Well, I'm pleased to see you home again, boy. — How's the Senator, Miss Olivia ?"

"He's himself again, Oscar. — This is Clay's wife."

"Hello there. You ain't a Texas girl, I hear."

"No." Hilda smiled. "I'm a Yankee."

"I can tell that to hear you talk, all right." The station master laughed, helping Clay put the suitcases in the car. Clay gave him the baggage checks.

"I've got a trunk and some boxes with my paintings in them, Oscar. Have them sent out to the house, will you?"

"Sure will, Clay. — Ain't any pictures there I could take a peek at, are they?" He laughed and slammed the car door shut. "Got some Frenchy pictures, Clay?"

"Yes, I've got some naked ones there."

"Oh, Clay," Olivia said. "Goodness."

Clay drove away from Oscar's long, disbelieving laughter. The station was a mile from the courthouse square, at the foot of a slope, and it had been expected when the railroad first reached Rutherford that the town would build solidly down the hill to the tracks. But there was a cluster of buildings near the station, then a long space of vacant lots flanked by sidewalks fringed with tall grass until near the top of the hill the buildings of the town rose as if within a city wall to encircle the square. They were all together in the front seat, Olivia between Clay and Hilda.

"How does it look to you, Clay?" Olivia put her hand lightly on his knee.

"Just the same. There's not a stone I don't remember."

"I can't believe you're home again. Somehow I never expected you would come. I was so surprised when I got your letter, and Papa was real pleased. He's waiting to see you, Clay — and you too, Hilda."

"I thought he'd be in his office at this time of day," Clay said. "It's not like the Senator to take the afternoon off. Is he all right, Olivia?"

"Yes. — But he hasn't been well, Clay. Your grandfather isn't as young as you remember him. Clay, he doesn't go to the office any more. He's retired."

"Retired!"

"Yes. He didn't want to. It wasn't his idea ever to take his harness off, but Dr. Valentine told him he must. He's worked too hard, Clay, all his life."

Clay drove around the courthouse and at the end of the avenue

he saw the yellow gables of the tall house whose staid and uncompromising exterior seemed to represent Amon Hall, mellowed only by the green canopy of ivy above the piazza. Clay stopped the car at the hitching block and as he got out he put his hand on the smooth iron head of the Negro boy which had stood there with outstretched hand since he could remember. Then he stood with his hands on his hips looking at the house, saying : "You know, Aunt Olivia, I remember the lawn as being twice as wide as that. And the house seems smaller too. — I guess I have been away a long time."

Hilda had sat silent on the drive from the station, looking at the two-storied buildings in a hollow square around the courthouse, some with false fronts, at the bank building rising surprisingly eight stories above the street, at the wagons in the square, the hitching posts and the saddled horses twitching their tails in the sunlight. She had looked at Clay's eager face and at Olivia, the gentle faded old woman with her hair white against the purple hat, her gloved hands clasped in her lap. Now she went shyly with them across the lawn to the piazza, and at the front door Olivia reached out and took her hand, smiling. Hilda looked into the thin, pale-skinned face, with the eyes a startlingly clear blue color beneath black eyebrows.

"I want you to feel at home with us, Hilda," Olivia said.

An old Negro opened the front door. He was small and bent far over and his face was yellow and creased in a pattern of wrinkles like old, sun-cracked leather. His toothless mouth was opened loosely in a grin as he shook Clay's hand.

"Clemmy, are you still alive ?" Clay said. "How old are you now ?"

"I'm jes' about de same, Mistah Clay. I'm proud you's home agin."

"This is my wife, Clemmy. Miss Hilda."

The Negro bobbed his head and grinned at her. "Is that you-all's bags yonder, Mistah Clay ? I'll fetch 'em in."

"But you couldn't carry those bags," Hilda said.

"I spec' I kin, ma'am."

"You leave them there, Clemmy," Clay said. "I'll bring

them in later. Come on, Hilda." He went ahead into the study. Amon Hall was seated in a big leather chair near the window with his long fingers gripped on the stuffed arms, his head thrust forward as he peered toward the door.

"Hello, Senator," Clay said.

"Well, Clay, so it's you." Amon Hall cleared his throat. "I'm glad you're home again. Sit down."

Clay turned toward the door where Hilda stood, Olivia a shadowy figure beyond. "Come in," he whispered. She looked at him, her lips pinched together, her eyes shy and pleading. Clay took her hand.

"This is Hilda, Senator."

"Oh yes. Yes. Your wife, Clay." Amon Hall stood up and held out his hand and Hilda looked into his narrowed eyes as his wiry fingers pressed hers briefly. Then he said. "Well, sit down, all of you."

Clay sat looking at his grandfather. His hair was whiter now and his whole body seemed more brittle because of the stiffness of his bearing, the slight jerkiness of his movements when he had risen from his chair. He had not thought of his grandfather before as an old man. There was now an indecisive pause ; idle conversation was difficult with Amon. In the shaded study they sat in a formal circle and Olivia's foot tapped gently on the hardwood floor.

"Coming through Saint Louis I got you a present, Senator," Clay said. "How would you like a hot toddy?"

"Toddy? Why, it ain't winter time."

"I brought you some Bourbon whisky."

"Well, I might have a little with soda water. Thank you, Clay."

"It's in my bag. I'll get it." Clay stood up, then laughed. "There's Clemmy trying to carry in the bags. I told him not to."

"There's a heap of work left in that nigger," Amon said.

"But those bags are heavy, Papa," Olivia said. "Clay, you help him."

"Yes, I'm going to."

Clay left the room and Hilda looked after him. There was a

long silence, then Olivia said : "Clay writes so little about himself. Tell me, Hilda, how was his exhibition ?"

"His what ?" Amon asked, turning his head.

"The show of his paintings, Papa, at one of the New York galleries. . . ."

"It went very well," Hilda said. "It was a good show." She looked around her at the sombre study, at the Indian arrows in a glass case above the mantel, at the rows of law books.

"What did the critics say ? Did Clay bring any clippings ?"

"Yes, he has them."

"What was this show for ?" Amon Hall peered at her. "To sell pictures ?"

"Yes, and to get himself known by the critics."

"Well, did he sell any ?"

Hilda glanced at Olivia, and after a moment said quietly : "No."

"Papa, whether a picture sells isn't its criterion," Olivia said, her hands fluttering in her lap.

Amon grunted and looked up at Clay, who just then had carried his gladstone bag into the study.

"I never did think you'd be an artist, Clay," Amon said.

Clay opened the bag and took out the bottle. He did not answer and Olivia and Hilda exchanged glances in which there was a common understanding, as together they spread their wings like mother hens to protect him.

"Vincent Meyer, the man who owns the gallery, was very complimentary," Hilda said in a rather high, unnatural voice. "He told Clay to paint more pictures for him."

"Did he ?" Amon grunted, then turned his head. "What do you want, Ina ? What are all those glasses for ?"

"I sent for them," Clay said. A Negress with a thin pointed face came into the room, her lean body electric with vitality as she strode across to the table and put a tray with three glasses on it beside the bottle.

"This is my wife, Ina," Clay said. "Hilda, this is one of the finest cooks in the southwest."

"Now, Mistah Clay. — My eyes been buckin' and skinnin' to

see you, ma'am. We's heard a lot about Mistah Clay's wife." The woman's eyes were bright and curious and she stood looking at Hilda until Amon waved her away impatiently.

"That's all, Ina." He looked at Clay. "What are all those glasses for?"

"Why, I thought I'd join you in a drink, Senator," Clay said, and seeing his grandfather glance at Hilda he added quickly, with a smile, "and maybe Olivia too."

"Oh, mercy no, Clay." Olivia giggled.

"So you drink now, do you, Clay?" Amon Hall said, and he made no further comment until Clay gave him the glass of whisky, iced, and poured water into it. "That's enough." Amon lifted the glass to his lips. "Yes, that's good. That's very fine."

"Papa, I'm going to show Hilda to her room, and you and Clay can talk," Olivia said.

"Yes, all right." Amon waited until they had left the study, then he looked at Clay. "She seems a clever girl. Yes, right sharp."

"She is," Clay said.

"Where did you say her people were from, Clay?"

"New Hampshire."

"New England, eh? — How do you think she'll like ranch life?"

"She ought to like it."

"It's not like a farm in New England. — Clay, I want you to move out to the ranch right away." Amon looked up over the rim of his glass. "You're needed out there. I've put on a new herd and I want that ranch to show a good profit this year. I'm depending on you."

"I'm anxious to get out there," Clay said. "Have you got good saddle-horses, Senator?"

"There are horses. — But I've got four hundred head of Hereford stock to be looked after, Clay. They need to be dehorned and watched out for. I'm going to keep them through the winter and sell them as feeders in the spring. — I want you to do a good job, Clay."

"I will, Senator."

"I'll keep an eye on you. Olivia and I will make regular trips out there to see how things are going. And I want you to see that Melvin Coleman minds his oats, Clay. He's apt to shirk his job and I want you to get after him."

"I'll do that."

Amon's cheeks were slightly flushed as he sipped the whisky. He rarely took his eyes from Clay, and once or twice he smiled, for no apparent reason, and rubbed one palm along his bony knee. When he had finished his drink he put the glass on the floor at his feet, bending over stiffly, and said: "Clay, do you want to walk downtown with me? Don't you want to see Rutherford again?"

"Yes," Clay said. "I'll drive you down if you like."

"Well, yes, all right," Amon said with a frown, remembering the doctor's advice to give up his walks to town. He stalked ahead of Clay to the door and they went together to the car at the carriage block.

"You need a new car, Senator," Clay said casually as he started the motor.

"Why, nonsense. This one runs all right."

"It's the same one you had when I was here last."

"I know it is. It's good enough." Amon turned his head away, his shoulders moving uneasily against the leather seat. As they drove along the wide street toward the square he said: "Things have changed since you went away, Clay. We've had hard times here."

"It's that way all over the world," Clay said.

"Yes, I know it is. A lot of fine merchants went out of business here. Do you remember Logan's drug store? It was here back in 1876, when I first came to Texas. — Well, that closed down. At one time there were six vacant stores on the square. It looked mighty bad, so the chamber of commerce arranged to have other merchants lend some of their merchandise to put in the show windows, so they wouldn't be empty, so it would look like they were still doing business. — Stop here at the corner by the bank, Clay."

Clay drove to the curb, obliquely, between two white lines, and Amon nervously fidgeted with the door handle until Clay leaned over and released the catch. They got out, and several men on the bench against the limestone wall said, "Howdy, Senator." Amon walked past them with a nod and Clay followed. They went into the bank, and then Amon was saying : "Pruett, you remember my grandson ?"

"Hello, Clay, how are you ? Back from France at last, I see."

"Yes."

"Can you still parleyvous English, Clay ?"

"Yes, I haven't forgotten."

Amon broke in with a wave of one hand. "Well, Pruett, I've got four hundred of the prettiest white-faced Herefords you ever saw out at Briar Creek." He was smiling in a gay, triumphant way and his long nose shone red in a ray of sunlight. "Clay's going to look after them."

"Decided to be a rancher after all, have you, Clay ?"

"I'm going to try it, Mr. Pruett."

"It's a better way to make a living than painting pictures," Amon said. "Clay found that out. — Pruett, what are we going to do for a little rain hereabouts ?"

"It's time we had some, Amon, and that's a fact."

"We can go a week or two longer without it," Amon turned to Clay. "Boy, let's walk over to the courthouse and see what's going on today. — Good day, Pruett."

"So long, Senator. — Come in again, Clay."

They continued around the square. They stopped in the Royal Dry Goods Emporium, at the hotel, at the town's other bank, and each time there was the formal presentation : "You remember my grandson Clay ?" and a few words about the weather and out again into the sunlit square. They stopped in a drug store where Amon drank a glass of buttermilk, where the clerk addressed him as "Senator" with a certain familiar hearty manner, and as Clay sat smoking a cigarette he puzzled over the attitude toward his grandfather, reflecting that the somewhat tolerant, humoring greetings showed his years more plainly than the gray hair and stooped shoulders, the jerky near-sighted gait.

They crossed the square toward the courthouse and Amon said : "That's where I tried my first law case, Clay, way back in 1876. I won it too. It was a fellow stole some corn, and I reckon he stole it, but I got him off. It was my speech to the jury that did it." The old man chuckled, remembering how he had pressed his black suit in the office in which he worked and slept, remembering Rutherford as it had been then, with the tents of immigrants under the trees at the north of the square where now there were buildings and paved streets.

"I didn't know this courthouse had been here so long," Clay said. On the cornerstone at the right of the arched entrance were cut the numerals 1889.

"Well, it has. Of course it has," Amon said. He brushed past Clay and went impatiently into the building. In the corridor they met a group of men and Clay was introduced again, interminably was shaking hands, and after a few moments when Amon went into the court room he slipped out into the park. At one end of it was a bronze statue of a Confederate soldier, mottled in pale bright green streaks by the weather, which had been erected by the Ralph Clayton chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy. Ralph Clayton had been Clay's great-grandfather ; through marriage with his daughter Amon Hall had gained control of the furniture factory and the ranch at Briar Creek. Clayton had been an early settler in Paladora County ; he had helped to lay out the town of Rutherford. There was a life-size tinted drawing of his head in Olivia's room.

Clay sat down on the rail fence surrounding the park. Now that the excitement of his return had passed he was able to sit looking at the town, at the white front of the Alamo Café opposite, with a strange oppressive feeling that he had never been away. There seemed to be no change. Amon Hall had taken up again with him where he had left off four years before, with only a satisfied recognition of the hiatus as an experiment that had proved him right.

From the rail fence where he sat Clay looked slowly around the square, identifying all the buildings that were familiar to him, many with the same signs that before had been there, some now

with electric and neon lights incongruously thrusting steel frameworks out from the old-fashioned walls. Opposite him was the office of the *Rutherford Post* and seeing it he thought of Merle Haws, with whom he had played in boyhood, who had been his classmate the two years Clay had attended the university. Clay swung down from the fence and crossed the street. The newspaper office was on the ground floor ; behind a railing there were two desks, at one of which Merle was reading copy. Beyond a glass partition in the rear were the presses, silent now. Clay went up to the railing and quietly said : "Hello, Merle."

Merle turned his head slowly. "Well, Clay Hall, how are you ? Say, I heard you were coming home." He got up from the desk and came toward the railing, his round face shining. "When did you get in ?"

"Today."

"Well, how you been ?" Merle pumped Clay's hand. "Jesus, it's been a coon's age. How does it feel to be back in the sticks ?" Clay went inside the railing, and they sat at Merle's desk and talked. Merle took a pint bottle of whisky from a bottom drawer. "Come on, Clay, right out of the bottle. Not too proud, are you ? — Remember how we used to burn our guts out with corn ? Had lye in it and tasted of fusel oil."

"I was weaned on it," Clay said, and tilted the bottle.

"Clay, you old horny frog, it's great to have you back again," Merle said, and reached for the bottle. "And speaking of frogs, how about those French gals, Clay ? How did you do ?"

"All right."

"I'll bet. Some day I'm going to hop a boat and try some of it." Clay smiled, remembering a raw spring night in their freshman year at the university. They had roomed together. Clay had been a timid, self-conscious youth, but Merle always had been expansive and a braggart. He liked to boast of his success with women. "I changed my luck when I was twelve years old," he used to say. And Clay had been impressed, until one rainy night in the spring when he was returning from the movies and a girl called to him as he passed her on a corner. She had been a little drunk ; she had fastened on Clay's arm and he

was embarrassed and afraid of her. She was part Mexican, with oily black hair and a wisp of moustache above her full lips. He had taken her by a back street to their dormitory, to the first floor windows of their rooms, and knocked on a window-pane. "Merle, look what I brought you," he had said, and now he remembered Merle's sleepy, surprised face, the forced composure with which the pale fat boy had sought to hide from Clay his own inexperience.

"Clay, you remember Joe Phillips," Merle was saying. "Did you know he's dead?"

"No. I'm sorry to hear that."

"Took bichloride of mercury. I was a pallbearer." Merle took another drink. "About a month ago, Clay."

"But he was never a morbid sort of fellow," Clay said, trying to remember Joe Phillips clearly after five years. They had been in high school together; they had gone to dances and drunk corn whisky together. And yes, he remembered once they had driven to Dallas to take college board examinations and the night before they had picked up two girls and bought a bottle of whisky from a Negro porter in a garage. The girls were on their way to Waco and Joe had said: "Hell, we'll drive you there," and they had started out on a wild ride that ended in a small town miles from Dallas where they had lost the road just at dawn. Joe had stopped the car and they were all taking a drink when a silver racing car, mud-spattered, swung suddenly around a corner into the dirt street. Joe had called to the driver. He was going south to drive in the road races at a county fair and sure, he'd be tickled to take the gals along. They gave him the bottle of whisky, too, and they reached Dallas fifteen minutes before the examination began. Both of them failed, and on that account Clay did not go to college in the East, as he had intended.

"Joe was a nice guy," Clay said. "What was the reason?"

"No job for a long time, Clay," Merle said. "He had a wife and kid. He was insured, and it got where he was afraid he wouldn't be able to meet the next premium payment. Jesus, it broke me up, Clay. I had to write his obituary. We used to pal around a lot, Joe and me, after you went to France."

Clay reached for the bottle and took a deep swallow. Merle found a bottle of sodamints in a pigeonhole of his old-fashioned roll-top desk and swallowed one, saying : "I oughtn't to drink in the middle of the day. My digestion's not so good. I guess I ought to get married, too, and settle down. — Remember Jennie Thurston, Clay ? She's married."

"Of course I remember her," Clay said. He had gone to his first dance at Jennie's house. They had been schoolmates and when he returned one summer from the ranch he had found everyone suddenly much grown up ; there had been three dances that summer, they had told him with a certain superior air of sophistication. Clay received a formal note from Jennie Thurston, inviting him to the dance and asking him to bring Irma Lipscom, a short fat girl with a face broad as a toad's, with gold braces on her teeth. Clay had been awkward and a poor dancer, and he remembered the fishy stare on the faces of his friends when he offered Irma's dance program. He had been bitterly resentful, and finally he wrote his own name in every space but one. The program was a small red book with the dances numbered and the titles of the songs — *Margie*, and the *Home Again Blues*, the *Twelfth Street Rag* and *Grieving for You*, he remembered. And *Alice Blue Gown*, which was the last on the program, and which always after that made him remember when he heard it those nervous sweaty hours he had spent stumbling with Irma Lipscom in the living room and parlor of the Thurston house, where the rugs had been rolled up and chairs placed back against the wall. No one cut in, and only Joe Phillips had taken a dance with Irma, making Clay promise to relieve him after the first encore. But after that, at the next dance, Clay had not been asked to bring Irma Lipscom, and a few months later she did not come to the dances at all. Jennie Thurston had been Clay's best girl then for a while. He had dated her for every important dance, and he would slip quietly out of the house in the evening and take the Senator's car without permission. They saw each other nearly every day, and they were forever writing letters, intense, posing letters, which Jennie would sign in the red ink she used : "Yours til Kewpies wear dresses," or "Yours til W. J. Bryan

gets gloriously drunk." After Christmas that year she went away to boarding school in Dallas, and gradually they stopped writing to each other.

"Whom did she marry?" Clay asked suddenly, unaware that Merle had been talking of something else.

"Who?"

"Jennie Thurston."

"Oh, a fellow from Abilene. She lives out there now."

"I'll have to look her up some time," Clay said vaguely. "Say, whatever happened to Irma Lipscom?"

"The Lipscoms moved to Fort Worth, Clay — a long time back. There aren't so many of the old bunch left around here now. You remember Lucy Anne Crawford, don't you?"

Clay nodded. It was like reading newspapers of years ago to hear Merle gossip, and it depressed Clay. He felt no point of contact with Merle any more, and he was not particularly curious. Merle went on talking about Lucy Anne Crawford. "She left town in a hurry and went to New York. Had to, I guess, Clay." He grinned. "She was a nice kid, but she was no good. — Remember that time when my folks were away and I threw a party up at the house?" There had been a couple of girls from the south side of town whom Joe Phillips knew, and the party had lasted over a week-end. Clay had been shocked when Merle turned up with Lucy Anne. She became very drunk on corn whisky and once in the night began to scream and they were all worried. Merle had to put a pillow over her head, and then the other girls gave her a cold bath. Clay had a bad taste from that week-end for a long time, and he had been ashamed of himself for living that kind of life and going around with a nice girl like Jennie Thurston at the same time. He had been seventeen then.

"So you up and married, Clay," Merle was saying. "Say, I want to meet your wife."

"I'll bring her around some time," Clay looked at his watch. "I've got to meet the Senator, Merle."

"Well, stop in again, Clay. We'll fix something up some evening. You and I ought to go out and get drunk together,

like we used to. You know, it's a cinch now. You don't have to drive out on the prairie and get cockle-burrs on your pants and chigres in your legs. You can check in at one of these tourist camps any time, with *anybody*."

Clay went back to the car and found Amon there. The old man frowned and shot a sharp look at Clay from the shadow of his recessed eyes. "So there you are. — I didn't see you slip out, Clay. There was a right interesting case in court, too. You should have listened to it. There were people there who've known you since you were a baby. You ought to have stayed and talked to them."

Back at the gabled house Clay saw the bottle of Bourbon whisky still on the table in the study and he took it to the kitchen. Ina was at the stove and old Clemmy sat at the table, looking at Clay with his wide loose smile brightening his face.

"Clay, you's home again," Ina said. "It's de old days back now."

"Yes. — How about a little drink, Ina, out of the Senator's bottle?"

"Whooh, he better not catch us. I sho' will have some, Clay." She wiped her hands on her apron and brought two glasses.

Clemmy raised his mottled face, saying: "What vittles we got fer dinnah, Miss Ina?"

"Dere's black-eyed peas and p'taters and maybe some bacon fer you. — We needs some ice, Clay. I'll git it."

"Pears lak we has a pow'ful lot of black-eyed peas, Miss Ina," Clemmy said, his eyes following her. "Wouldn't mind a cut o' spare ribs nevah so often."

"You got to earn yo' vittles wif de Sen'tor, Clemmy, and he don't think you earns mo'n black-eyes and co'n pone," Ina said, "It's de truf, Clay. He don't set de table lak you remember." She put ice in their glasses and Clay poured the drinks. Clemmy watched them and licked his lips.

"No need fer you to put on dat way, Clemmy," Ina said. "Ain't no whusky fer a man as old as you is, wif de misery you got. I'll serve yo' vittles now, but you ain't gwine eat 'thout yo' doll, is you?"

"Have you still got that doll, Clemmy?" Clay asked. "What was its name?"

"Susie," Ina said. "You ought to remember that, Clay."

Clemmy left the kitchen and Clay watched him shuffle across the back lawn to the servants' house in the shade of a chinaberry tree. Then he winked at Ina: "I'm going to get my wife, Ina. I'll bring her down the back way. Have another glass ready, will you?"

"Sho' I will."

He found Hilda in their room, guiltily hiding a cigarette when he opened the door. He laughed. "It's not as bad as that, is it?"

"You told me to be careful."

"Well, come downstairs and we can manage a drink. Want one?"

"Do I! — After the way you calmly had yourself a drink downstairs and left me sitting there thirsty. — And Clay, when he said 'so you drink now, Clay,' you didn't even bat an eye!"

They went down the back stairs and into the kitchen by way of a porch in the rear. They found Clemmy at his seat by the table holding an old rag doll in his arms. The cloth that formed its body was the color of old parchment, and so thin that the padding showed darkly through it. A face had once been painted on the smaller padded shape of the head, but now only one eye remained, a chipped black button. A tuft of thread showed where the other had been.

Ina had their glasses ready and she smiled warmly at Hilda, and the three talked in guilty whispers while Clemmy was noisily eating black-eyed peas and corn bread. There were two places set at the table and Ina, smiling at Hilda, explained: "One of dem plates is fer Susie, his dolly. She always eats wif him."

Clemmy glanced up at them, hearing the name, and then they heard him saying: "You sho' got a pow'ful appetite, Susie. — Looky how dem vittles am disappeared, Miss Ina, looky here. Susie et most all of it and ol' Clemmy ain't had ha'dly nuffin."

Ina laughed. "Ain't gonna do you no good, Clemmy. You jes' got to train yo' Susie not to eat so hoggish."

"I tries to, ma'am, but li'l Susie's gittin' old now. Dey ain' no time you needs yo' vittles de most as when you's agin'. Ain't dat de truf? I don't know jes' how old she is, but I had her nevah since she was 'at high." He held his palm up a foot from the floor, his bare black head bobbing up and down and his loose grin turned to Hilda and Clay.

"He means since *he* was 'at high," Ina said.

"She ain' nevah lef' me in all dat time," Clemmy said. "No suh, she's slep' wif Clemmy and et wif Clemmy fer round about two hunerd years, I specs."

Ina grinned and glanced at the doll. "Why don' you sew a new eye on her, Clemmy, and freshen up her face some. She'd be a right smart gal if'n you was to do dat."

"No, Miss Ina." He shook his head slowly, staring at his empty plate. "It ain't no use. We's gittin' old, Susie and me. Dey ain' no freshenin' up of my face, so Susie ain' wantin' to change hers neider. She's gittin' awful old, Miss Ina. She ain' gwine last much longah, and when she goes ol' Clemmy goes too."

"Whooh, nigger, don't you talk so sad," Ina laughed and went to get his plate and as she filled it she grinned at Hilda. "Ain't it awful de way he goes on, jes' so's he'll git some mo' in his dish. Every day he does dat, Miss Hilda."

"But doesn't the poor man get enough to eat?" Hilda said, looking at Clemmy's shining smile.

"It's jes' because he's sly," Ina said. "He's a sly one, a-righty. He gits plenty vittles, I reckon, but de truf is de Sen'tor don't set de table he used to. He's always talkin' about dis now econo-mize. He looks at de bills and he reads 'em over two or t'ree times and I got to explain every cup of flour I use. Why — now don't you tell him dis, Clay."

"Of course not, Ina."

"Well, one week dere was two dollars' wuth o' toothpaste on de bill and I never seen de ol' man so mad. If he ever found out dat toothpaste was snuff I charged on de bill I reckon he'd yank all de hair out my haid." Ina walked laughing over to the stove, then glanced back at them. "I'm fixin' to serve supper now, Clay, if you-all's ready."

"All right," Clay said, and a few minutes later they were seated in the gloomy dining room with a view of the rose bushes and the lawn and the arbor draped with honeysuckle. Amon, as soon as he had sat down, glanced at Clay and then turned to Olivia and said : "I thought Clay would be interested in talking to people, but he didn't seem to want to." Clay opened his mouth to answer, then looked away in silence. He realized then that his grandfather had been disappointed in him. The last of his generation, with no one who remembered with him the old days, he had wanted to reminisce through Clay ; he had wanted to point out to Clay the landmarks in his life, the things he had thought much about.

Amon and Clay faced each other across the table, and Olivia was opposite Hilda. In her gentle, hurried voice she was apologetic, with a side glance at Amon, as she said : "When summer comes on we eat very lightly. — Clay, is there enough for you ? Are you still hungry ?"

"It's good healthy food," Amon said. "And there's plenty of it." He frowned and bent over his bowl with his lips pursed out, sucking milk from a spoon.

"Clay, I hope you and Hilda stay in town a few days before you go out to the ranch," Olivia said quickly. "You ought to look up some of your old friends."

"Clay don't seem interested in seeing people," Amon said, looking up. "And I want him out on the ranch right away." He turned to Hilda. "Do you know anything about ranch life, young lady ?"

"No, I've never been on a ranch."

"It's a rough life, but it's healthy. There won't be the conveniences you're used to. Can you ride a horse ?"

"Yes."

"Well, you can help Clay ride the fences. A long day's ride will do you good. — And Clay, those cattle need to be de-horned."

"I'll see to it," Clay said.

After dinner they sat for a time on the piazza, under the ivy, as night descended and the stars came out in clusters overhead,

as fireflies drifted in yellow flashes against the hedge. Olivia sat silently in her rocking chair with her hands folded in her lap. She looked often at Clay, with deep contentment to see his alert profile sharpening again its blurred outlines in her memory. Hilda was beside her, her blonde hair lit by the lamp in the study behind them, and Olivia considered if Hilda bleached her hair, if some preparation induced the golden glints in it. The girl had too severe a mouth, Olivia thought, too pronounced a chin. Clay would have some difficult times with her. While Clay and Amon were talking, while they were isolated from the conversation of the men, Olivia began to question her quietly. "Clay said you were from New England."

"Yes, New Hampshire." Hilda turned her head with a slight smile, and Olivia thought that the severe lines of her mouth were the prim lines of New England. She would become opinionated ; she would try to dominate, Olivia decided, after daily living together had made more plain their differences.

"Clay didn't say how he met you," Olivia said. "He really hasn't told us anything."

"We were both in the south of France — at a fête in a little coast town on the Mediterranean. We met casually."

"I suppose you knew people in common — that sort of thing ?"

Hilda looked at Olivia closely before she said : "Oh, in France everyone knows everyone else — Americans, I mean."

"I don't want you to think I'm a curious old woman," Olivia said. "But we're so fond of Clay, and we want to like Clay's wife too. We want to know all about her."

"There's very little to tell, Miss Hall. I'm just a usual sort of girl. I was brought up in the country, with three sisters, I'm the eldest. I went to New York to school, and then to Paris to study design." Hilda smiled, with a disarming glance at Olivia. "I've kept house a little, but I'm not a good cook."

Hilda was aware of the quality of Olivia's hostility, an instinctive jealousy. But she was very tired. She did not want to talk, to overcome her reticence and make an effort to charm Olivia. She let the conversation die away, and later when she and Clay went to their room, a large room with windows on two sides and

violet-flowered wallpaper, she threw herself down on the bed. "Clay, for God's sake sneak downstairs and find that bottle. I need a drink — and a cigarette. Give me a cigarette."

"I brought two bottles," Clay said. "Wait a minute."

He went to the bathroom and returned with two glasses and a pitcher of water, and he took a pint bottle of whisky from a suitcase.

"Surprise," he said, and as he unscrewed the cap of the bottle : "Is it as bad as that ?"

"It unnerved me a little. — I hate to feel I'm on probation."

"He's not a boogie man. Here's your drink."

She sat cross-legged on the bed. "But Olivia's sweet, isn't she ? She understands how to handle the old man, in her quiet way. — I had a long talk with her. It's obvious that she's wrapped up in you."

"I know. My mother died when I was a kid, Hilda, and Olivia adopted me. She was never married and she treats me like her son. Nothing I could do would be wrong with her."

"This house is rather ghostly, Clay. — I'm glad we're going to the ranch at once."

"It shouldn't be ghostly," he said, sitting down on the bed opposite her. "But it's different. The atmosphere of the place has changed. It didn't seem so dismal here before. Have you noticed, there aren't any lights left burning, even in the halls. You have to turn them on to go downstairs and then somebody turns them off after you. It's like a minuterie in France. — And the food. There used to be a groaning board, literally. The Senator always ate well."

"Now's he's down to crackers and milk."

"And he seems to think everyone else should have only crackers and milk too."

"I want to go out to the ranch, Clay, where we won't be dependent on anyone. I hate being a guest."

"We'll have our own home after tomorrow. — And Hilda, you'll have to cook. Have you thought of that ?"

"God help you, Clay."

They laughed, and that night it seemed strange to Clay to lie

in the room where he had slept sometimes as a boy, to feel alien to it, to have allied himself with this woman he had known so short a time against all that had been familiar to his life since he could remember.

VII

CLAY drove the car, and Hilda rode with him in the front seat while Amon sat fretfully among the luggage with Olivia behind them. It was a clear day and although they started early for the ranch it was already hot as they turned off from the town square and drove along a broad paved road toward a distant hill. Off to the left was the line of trees along the course of the East Fork of the Brazos River, toward which the road gradually turned. The houses became wider spaced as they drew away from the town, then they descended a hill and on flat low ground there came to view a village of makeshift houses, of tin and weathered boards and tarpaper, of picket fences wired for repair and of dried cracked mud. The sun beat down on the flats, and the ground seemed to exude a haze of moisture in the heat, although it was plain to see the soil was dry as sawdust.

"Clay, what's that?" Hilda asked.

"That? Oh, Niggertown."

"You mean the Negroes live there — huddled down there in the mud."

"Sure. It's that way in every Texas town." Clay glanced at her fleetingly. "When I was a kid this was dangerous territory, our battleground. We white boys used to come down here and chunk rocks at the nigger boys. We had running battles with them, and once I remember we had two new BB rifles. We won that fight." He laughed.

"You mean you shot at them?"

"Well, we shot at their legs. Nobody was hurt. It only stings pretty hard."

"Clay, I believe you're just as medieval as the rest of them."

"Oh, we were only kids."

Hilda turned away from him, looking with a frown at the

grove of pecan trees in the river bottoms, at the green plain beyond. They crossed a wooden bridge, with the red water down below, and mounted a ridge, following the highway along it. Ahead of them a chaparral cock leaped from the bushes and raced along the road for a hundred yards before it spread its wings and soared briefly into the underbrush. They came to a cross-roads and Clay without hesitation turned to the left. It was familiar territory to him now ; he recognized the long rolling shapes of the hills, the wide turn of the road ahead of him. He remembered the soft hollow of the land between the hills and the dome-shaped hill that after a time rose up ahead of them out of the deep grass, above a grove of trees. Beyond the hill lay the valley of Briar Creek and the ranch. He was driving fast, and once Amon cautioned him, saying : "There's no call for such speed, Clay. Now you take care."

"Papa's used to my driving," Olivia said.

They swept around the base of the hill, turned left at a cross-roads and beyond, below them, they saw the trees of the creek bottoms and off to the right the white ranch-house under pecan trees.

"There's your new home," Clay said.

"It looks beautiful, Clay. Why, this doesn't seem such rugged country."

The road ran between barbed wire fences on a long descending slope to the creek, where there was a ford — a great white slab of flaky rock across which the water flowed in a thin sparkling sheet. At the right, after climbing the opposite bank, they came to a red gate, which Melvin Coleman was holding open. He raised one hand in greeting and Clay stopped the car half-way through the gate.

"I seen you come over the rise," Melvin said. "I knowed it was the Senator's car."

"Melvin, you remember Clay, don't you ?" Amon said.

"Shore I do."

"How are you, Melvin. — This is my wife."

Melvin took off his straw hat and Hilda smiled, liking his thin

face above a long, scrawny neck, his pale gray eyes and wide loose mouth.

"Melvin, Clay's going to live out here," Amon said. "He's going to take my place and run the ranch."

"Is that right?"

"Drive on, Clay. — Come up to the house, Melvin."

"I will, Senator."

Clay drove on a few yards, then stopped the car and waited until Melvin had shut the gate and stepped on the running board. All the time Amon had been saying: "Go on, boy. What's holding you up?"

They drove to the ranch yard and Clay stopped the car by a white picket fence deep in milkweed. Beyond was the ranch-house and to the left of it, smoke coming from the chimney of piled-up rocks, was the old house of logs.

"Well, this is the ranch, young lady," Amon said to Hilda. "Get out and look around."

Melvin helped Clay take the suitcases from the car, and Amon watched him unstrap from the luggage carrier in the rear the crates that contained the canvases.

"Clay, you can just put those boxes in the barn," he said. "It's plenty dry there."

Clay winked at Hilda and picked up a suitcase. He and Melvin carried the luggage into the house, into the rooms that looked bare in spite of rag rugs on the floor, in spite of ponderous maple beds that had served their day in the gabled house in Rutherford together with massive bureaus finished in brass, with brass rings in place of handles on the drawers. The windows had been long shut and it was airless in the house, breathless and very still, and their heels echoed on the floor. In the barnyard a rooster was crowing, and it seemed they could hear the grass blades whispering together in the gentle wind; the leaves of a tall pecan tree in the yard stirred against the window-panes. Hilda threw open the door leading to the narrow piazza and went out into the air, breathing deeply, looking far across the plain to green and lavender hills beyond. Clay followed her. "Like it?"

"Oh, very much, Clay. Do we have it all to ourselves?"

"Yes, Melvin lives yonder in the log house."

Hilda looked at the old cabin with the black stovepipe thrusting through the chipped shingles, at the chimney of rocks which covered half the rear of the cabin, the wash-tubs hanging from nails in the logs, and the deep leathery green of the mulberry tree beyond. Then she went back into the ranch-house. There were three rooms besides the kitchen, all furnished with non-descript relics of the Rutherford house, furniture which was incongruous in the roughly built ranch-house, but which had the quiet, somnolent charm of age and service. From every window one could see the green prairie, like a limitless meadow spread out under the sun. Hilda went into the kitchen. There was a wood-burning range, a cupboard with thick white dishes. In the corner was a sink and a faucet. She turned on the tap and water ran steadily into the sink. It was more than she had expected and it excited her as if she had come upon a startling modern convenience.

"I had that put in," Olivia said, and Hilda turned in surprise to find Olivia standing behind her, smiling. "Papa made a fuss about it, I can tell you. But it's impossible to find a cook who'll stay out here in the country and I told him I wouldn't do the cooking without running water. The water comes from that tank yonder by the windmill. Sometimes the tank leaks and you must see that Melvin keeps an eye on it. There's a bathtub too, Hilda, but you have to heat water for it on the stove, of course. You see to it that Clay and Melvin keep enough wood chopped."

A girl in a sunbonnet came from the doorway of the log house and approached them, in her hands a covered pail. Olivia opened the door for her. "Hello, Blossom. I don't believe you've met Clay's wife yet."

"I'm shore glad to know you, Miz Hall." Blossom Coleman smiled and put the pail on the table. It had been the excuse for her curiosity. "I brought some fresh-made buttermilk fer you all. I know the Senator always likes a glass after the ride from town." The girl had a good complexion, unusual among coun-

try women, with no freckles and with color in her cheeks. Her round face was pretty, framed by dark hair, and she had round brown eyes.

"I've been showing Hilda how to keep house," Olivia said. "I hope you'll keep an eye on her, Blossom."

"Shore I will, Miss Olivia. There's plenty of milk and eggs fer you-all, Miz Hall. Just let me know how many you need. Melvin tells me you-all are going to live out here right permanent."

"Yes, we're next-door neighbors," Hilda said.

Clay walked with Amon out past the barn toward a corn field.

"Look at it, Clay," the old man said. "Just a sea of green leaves. That's as good corn as any in the county. That boy will be a farmer yet."

They found Melvin hoeing suckers among the tall stalks. He leaned on his hoe, smiling at them, and wiped his forehead with his shirt-sleeve. "Well, Senator, am I goin' to make a corn crop?"

"It looks like you are, Melvin. Yes, it does."

"Just so we git a little rain before the south winds burn it up."

"That's the trouble with farming in this country, Clay," Amon said as they walked on. "You never know when you're going to have rain. You wear your eyes out looking for a cloud." They went on through the corn to the fence by the creek. In the pasture beyond red Hereford cattle were grazing on a slope.

"I want you to ride out and look the herd over tomorrow, Clay," Amon said. "And when Melvin finishes hoeing the corn I want you to get the de-horning started."

"All right, Senator."

Amon leaned against the fence post, looking back at the corn. "You know, Clay, I didn't plant any cotton this year. It's the first year in a long time I haven't planted a crop of cotton." He chuckled. "But I got paid not to do it. Yes, paid by the government. I got ready cash, Clay, not to plant that hundred acre field yonder in cotton. What do you think of that?"

They walked on around the corn field and returned along a black dirt lane toward the ranch-house. Amon kicked at a clod

of dirt. "This black waxy soil is fine for crops, Clay. When I first came to Texas immigrants were moving in down here and all they had to do was go out with a plow and turn the soil, plow it open and let the nitrogen in, and the next year they'd have a crop. — This land has been worked pretty hard since then, though, but it's fertile still."

Clay saw Hilda in front of the log house with Olivia and Blossom Coleman. Hilda was holding a baby in her arms, and as they came up she laughed and turned the infant's face toward Clay.

"Isn't she cute? Three months old tomorrow."

"Is that Melvin's child?" Amon asked.

"Yes, sir, Senator," Blossom said. "Now you put her down, Miz Hall. You'll git tired out holding her up like that. She's real heavy. Wait and I'll git a box to put her in." She brought a cardboard carton from the house and put it in the grass, then placed the child in it. "That keeps the chigres off her."

"Chigres?" Hilda said. "What are chigres?"

"You'll find out," Clay said with a laugh.

Amon walked away toward the garden. All day he had gone about the ranch like one obsessed, from corn field to pasture, from house to barn to garden. He called back over his shoulder: "Olivia, come here."

They all followed him to the garden and he said: "We'll see what vegetables we can take back to town with us."

As they walked along the rows between the plants Blossom said: "There's plenty of garden sass. That lettuce is right fine. You better take some now before the pests git to it, Miss Olivia."

Amon went down on his knees, up-rooting radishes. He had found a basket by the garden gate and he tossed the vegetables into it. Olivia cut lettuce and plucked tomatoes ripe from the vine and Hilda and Clay stood watching while Blossom Coleman went about with suggestions, pulling up turnips and onions for them. When they left the garden with the full basket Amon was smiling. He put the basket in the shade of the windmill tank and drew a dipperful of water from the tap of the windmill. As he drank he held his shoulders back, breathing deeply.

"Those will taste mighty fine, Blossom," he said. "Nothing tastes better than vegetables from your own garden."

"That's the truth, Senator."

Melvin was coming along the lane with his hoe over his shoulder and Amon called to him : "Melvin, have you plowed up any potatoes yet ?"

"Yes, some of 'em, Senator."

"Where are they ?"

"Yonder in the barn. Come on and I'll show you."

"Come along, Clay," Amon said. They went through the corral gate and into the saddle-house. In a corner there was a pile of new potatoes. Amon leaned over and picked one up, feeling it, peeling back a strip of skin to look at the white meat.

"Looks like there are plenty of them," he said.

"It's a good yield, Senator," Melvin said.

"More than you could use, I expect. — Clay, get a towsack and fill it up with potatoes. I'll take them back to town."

"They'll make mighty fine eating," Melvin said.

"Yes, and I reckon I can sell some of 'em, too. I ought to get a couple of dollars cash money for a bag of these potatoes, and the grocer will be glad to have 'em. — Nothing like home-grown potatoes."

Clay knelt beside Melvin in the airless saddle-house and they tossed potatoes into the bag. Amon occasionally leaned over to select one and once he said : "Now I don't want to take more than half of them, Melvin. Half of them are yours. That's not more than half, is it ?"

"No, Senator. You still got some more coming."

"Well, I guess I'd better leave some for Clay and his wife to eat."

The sack was full and Melvin slung it over his shoulder and carried it to the car. Then Amon, with a straw between his teeth, went with Blossom to gather eggs. Melvin helped Clay carry the crates of canvases to the barn and while they were clearing a place for them Olivia came in.

"I declare, Clay," she said. "I wish I could stay out here on the ranch with you."

"Why don't you?"

"Oh, now." She smiled. "Papa needs me in town. — Clay, are those your pictures?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't I see some of them?"

"Sure. Melvin, have you got a hammer?"

"I'll git one, Clay."

He went away toward the saddle-house and Clay sat down on a bale of hay beside Olivia.

"Clay, I don't know if I told you, but he's planning to rent the house in Rutherford."

"Rent it? Why?"

"One of the bungalows is vacant and he says the house is too big for just the two of us. I suppose it is. — He's going to put an advertisement in the paper."

"I don't see the point of that," Clay said. "Do you, Olivia?"

"No, I don't. I hate to think of strangers being there, Clay, after the family has lived in it ever since it was built. It seems a shame. But Papa says it's an expense and he can rent it where he can't rent the bungalow. He doesn't like to waste money if he can help it."

"I've noticed that," Clay said.

"He began cutting down this winter, Clay. You know, he decided the furnace burned too much coal, so he quit using the furnace."

"What did you do for heat?"

"We had gas heaters in the bedrooms and the study. — But it wasn't warm enough, and it wasn't safe for a man as old as Papa to live that way. But he insisted it was an economy."

Melvin returned then with a hammer and Clay opened one of the cases. The paintings had been removed from their frames and he unrolled them and spread them out on bales of hay for Olivia to look at. She was puzzled by those more modern in treatment, but was enthusiastic, saying: "Clay, you're gone outside my knowledge altogether. I don't know what to say about them, but they're beautiful."

They heard a noise in the hay and Amon stamped into view, coming around a reaper. He saw them standing near the barn door, and nodded, then his eyes turned to the paintings on the hay. He walked over toward them.

"Well, they're mighty bright. Are these your pictures, Clay?"

"Yes."

"They don't seem to make much sense, but they're mighty bright. — Look here, Olivia." He opened a paper sack he was carrying. "Ain't they nice eggs? — right out of the nest. An even dozen. — Say, don't you think we'd better start back for town?"

"Yes, I suppose we ought, Papa."

"Come on, then."

Clay turned away and began rolling up the paintings and Olivia went out into the sunlight with Amon. She went into the house and frowned at her reflection in the pier-glass of the old maple bureau as she secured her hat with long, amethyst-studded hatpins. Hilda came and stood behind her, and after a reflective pause Olivia said: "I hope you two will be happy out here, Hilda." Her cobalt blue eyes looked steadily into the mirror and her dark eyebrows were drawn together. "I want you to take Clay in hand."

Hilda smiled. "There's nothing I can do with Clay."

"You can make him stand up for himself, dear."

Hilda leaned against the round oak table, with her head on one side as she looked at Olivia. "You mean with his grandfather?"

"Yes." Olivia turned away from the mirror, pinning her veil at the nape of her neck. "His father was never able to speak for himself and Clay won't be either unless he does it now. When he broke away and went to France I helped him to do it, Hilda." Amon was calling to Olivia from the car and she bit her lower lip. "When I come out again we'll have a long talk together, dear." Her fingers pressed Hilda's hand gently, then she went in a rustle of satin out into the grass. Hilda followed

and stood with Clay watching as Olivia drove down to the red gate, which Melvin was holding open. They stood in silence in the tall grass watching the car move slowly along the white road on the other side of Briar Creek.

"Well," Clay said. "Here we are." He smiled and pressed her hand, and they went into the house. Clay carried in wood from the woodpile under the mulberry tree behind the log house and built a fire in the stove. He showed Hilda how to regulate the damper and sat in a corner watching her as she prepared their first meal. He had brought lettuce from the garden, and tomatoes, and while he was making a salad dressing Hilda said : "Clay, do you know how much your grandfather pays Melvin ?"

"He gets half the crops he raises, I know."

"And ten dollars a month. Olivia told me. Ten dollars a month to live on, Clay."

"But he gets his food from the garden."

"In summer, yes." Hilda bent over the range, stirring a casserole in which she was heating soup from a can. Clay frowned and lit a cigarette. He sat down again, facing her, with his legs stretched out.

"But he raises potatoes and so forth to last him through the winter." He paused. "Of course the Senator takes half the potatoes. He took some away with him today, and do you know what he was going to do with them, Hilda ? — Sell them."

"Sell them !"

"Yes." Clay laughed. "Talk about Silas Marner. He thought he could get a couple of dollars for them at the corner grocery."

"For heaven's sake." She looked at him. "Clay, you certainly don't get your extravagance from your grandfather. Really, I suppose I should be thankful that you're careless about money, and not like him." She frowned. "If he didn't want the potatoes for himself why didn't he leave them here ?"

"He left some for us."

"I mean for Melvin — in the winter."

"Don't worry so about Melvin." Clay stood up. "He has his corn, and it looks like a bumper crop." Clay went to the

window and looked out at the plain ; beyond the corn field was the scarred land where cotton had formerly been planted. He said lightly : "The Senator didn't plant any cotton this year, for the first time in memory. His father was a cotton planter in Tennessee and he's always planted cotton. — He got paid by the government not to plant any, he told me."

"You mean he got paid for Melvin not to plant any."

Clay laughed. "Yes."

"Clay." He turned to find her staring at him with her lips pinched together. "Listen, Clay, did Melvin get any of that money ?"

"I don't know. I doubt it."

"He's entitled to it."

"How do you figure that ? It's the Senator's land."

"But he and Melvin were partners. Without Melvin there wouldn't have been any cotton and there wouldn't have been any money for not planting it."

"He could have hired someone else — but I suppose the fair thing to do would be to give Melvin a few dollars of it, and maybe he did," Clay said. "How about supper ?"

They watched the sunset from the piazza of the ranch-house that night, sitting near together, and Clay sighingly breathed the cool air. France now seemed very far away and he felt that a domestic rural life was what he had been longing for. Later, when they had lit the lamp in their bedroom, Hilda said : "Clay, I want you to do something for me."

"Yes ?"

"About that cotton. — If you spoke to your grandfather about it he might give Melvin his share. It probably never occurred to him to do it, any more than it did to you."

"Oh, for God's sake," Clay said. "Come to bed."

"Now don't be masculine and try to shut me up. — When he comes out again, Clay, talk to him — please."

"Oh, all right." Clay sighed. "If I get an opportunity."

Hilda turned her head away, smiling into the dark corner.

"This is our first night here," Clay said. "Don't busy your head so with reforming humanity all at once."

VIII

MELVIN awakened them the next morning when he slammed the screen door in setting a pail of milk on the back porch for them. The sun shone brilliantly in the narrow windows of the house and fell across the patched quilt that covered their bed. They dressed at once and Clay went to the wood-pile. It was at the edge of the ranch yard, by a rail fence on a bluff, and below was the swift-moving water of Briar Creek, sweeping among willows and the twisted vines of mustang grape down toward the wide soapy rock of the fording. He climbed over the fence and found a path down to the water where the incline was not so steep. Standing in deep blue-green water-grass on the bank of the creek, he was out of sight of the ranch-house and he stripped off his clothes and waded into the water. It was only waist-deep but so cool that it tightened his skin deliciously and as he put on his clothes the sunlight enveloped him in brisk morning warmth. He ran up the incline and vaulted the rail fence at the top. He gathered up an armful of wood and carried it to the kitchen, where he found Hilda at the stove, her slim tall figure moulded by brown jodhpurs and a yellow jacket with brass buttons.

"How do you like my ranch costume, Clay?" She pirouetted in front of him.

"You look like Billy the Kid." Clay laughed.

"Well, I don't intend to go about in a sunbonnet and gingham dress like Blossom Coleman."

"You don't have to. The fine thing about a ranch is that you can dress exactly as you please. There's no one to see you but doe-eyed cattle and jack-rabbits and buzzards. — Are you going to ride the pastures with me today?"

"No. I'll stay home and get this house in order. I think at least we could have curtains on the windows. Can't you make that concession on a ranch, Clay?"

"We want a place it's fun to live in. By all means curtains if you want them."

"Where do you suppose I could get some material? Not chintz. I will *not* have chintz, even for roughing it."

"Well, there's a general store at Briar Forks. We'll get Melvin to drive you there."

"Has he a car?"

"A model T that looks like an old-fashioned buggy. It's in the barn."

After breakfast Clay went to the corral. He found Melvin sitting on a sawhorse cleaning the carburetor of his car with gasoline.

"Well, Clay, are you ready to start work?"

"I thought I'd ride the fences today."

"I was out last week. I reckon you better take a look at the water gap in the east pasture. It's easiest to ride up along the creek bed to it. — Know anything about automobiles, Clay?"

"Not much."

"I bought this carburetor off a fellow and I want to put it in to go to church on Sunday. My old one's about wore out. — The whole car's wore out fer that matter, about ready to fall apart, it is. Come this fall I'm going to git me a new one, that is, if I make a good corn crop. Feller over to Briar Forks has one to sell."

Clay had not yet adapted himself to the easy, casual tempo. He had come to the corral to saddle a horse and the aimless conversation made him impatient. But he lit a cigarette and sat watching Melvin rub the carburetor clean with a rag. It was a still morning and they could hear every sound: a quail in the oat field beyond the barn, the clear cry of a crow above the trees of the creek in the distance. Blossom came out of the log house with the cardboard carton and a moment later brought the baby into the sun.

"How do you like my fine boy, Clay?" Melvin asked, looking up.

"What's his name?"

Melvin laughed. "Name is Louise. It's a gal, Clay, but to look at it indifferent you'd never know. I'll have a boy, though. I'll have seven sons to do the work when I start aging."

"But you have a kid brother, haven't you, Melvin? — Clinton, isn't it? Where is he?"

"He stays over to Briar Forks with Blossom's folks, Clay — goes to school there and does the small chores on the farm."

"He was pretty small when I left Texas," Clay said. "I guess he's grown up now. — Say, what's the best horse to ride, Melvin?"

"Ain't none of 'em any good."

"Why, the Senator said there were good horses out here."

"Used to be, maybe, but he had me hitch 'em up as a work team. Ain't a horse here that ain't been worked. I got what used to be a fine blood mare teamed up with the mule now. The Senator told me to do it." Melvin put the carburetor down and walked with Clay to the corral. "I drove the horses up this morning with the cows, thinking you'd want 'em, Clay. That dun horse is the best to ride. There's still some spark left in him."

They went through the gate and Melvin took a bridle from a hook on the door of the saddle-house and went to catch the dun. Clay rummaged in the saddle-house, and dragged a Mexican saddle with flaring tapaderos from a sawhorse. As Melvin led the dun horse up he said : "There ain't but one good saddle blanket left, Clay, that yaller one yonder. We just use gunny sacks."

"He shouldn't have let the ranch run down so," Clay said. "He used to have good horses and good equipment."

"I remember he did. That saddle's all right."

Melvin saddled a big bay horse and rode with Clay along the lane to the pasture gate. The grass was deep, and there were Mexican daisies and the tall green stalks of bear-grass. On the open plain Clay forced the dun horse to a gallop and Melvin rode close beside him, but after a few hundred yards the bay began to wheeze, with distended nostrils and ears pricked forward. Melvin reined him in.

"He's wind-broke," he said. "I tell you, Clay, there's terrible sorry stock on this ranch. It ain't hardly good enough to manage."

"At least the cattle look healthy," Clay said, turning toward a small herd grouped around a lone tree in caked whitish soil that had been mud. The steers made way slowly, turning fat red

flanks, and a bull with matted white curls on his brow tossed his head and pointed his glistening pink muzzle at Clay. There were several calves with longish, pointed horns.

"The Senator said he wanted us to attend to that de-horning right away," Clay said. "When will you have time to help me, Melvin?"

"In two or three days' time, Clay. The chute wants to be nailed up a bit."

"I can do that," Clay said, and when they returned later toward the pasture gate he dismounted at the corrals by the de-horning squeeze. The chute led from the corrals to a gate at the end, where there was a curved iron bar to clamp over the animal's head to hold it firm. Melvin brought him a canvas bag in which there was a hammer and nails and Clay examined the boards, driving in nails where they were needed. The sound of the hammer blows carried over the still prairie and Hilda heard it in the ranch-house where with mop and water she was scouring the floors. She went to the window and looking out across the plain saw the dun horse cropping grass near the chute. The Coleman baby was in the cardboard carton in the yard and Blossom in a pink sunbonnet was watering the tomato vines in the garden. Hilda put down her mop and went out into the sunlight. Blossom looked up when she heard the creak of the garden gate.

"Miz Hall, I declare, you oughtn't to go out without a hat."

"I never wear a hat in the country."

"Maybe you don't know this Texas sun. You'll git a stroke sure."

"I suppose I'd better wear one then," Hilda said. "How long have you been here on the ranch, Blossom?"

"About a year now. — But I was born and raised just three miles away over the rise yonder, near Briar Forks, Miz Hall."

"I don't know much about keeping house in the country. I want you to advise me, Blossom."

"Shore I will."

"You know, baking bread and all that. I don't think I could possibly learn to bake bread."

"Why, that ain't difficult. I'll show you how, Miz Hall."

"I thought maybe you'd bake enough for us all and sell it to us," Hilda said, glancing away at the lavender-shadowed hills.

"Oh now, Miz Hall, I wouldn't like to do that now," Blossom said, but with an eager lift in her voice. She looked up at Hilda, her round face in shadow from the sunbonnet.

"But I'm counting on you to do it for us, Blossom."

"Well, all right, if you want it that-a-way."

Hilda went back to the house with a pleased, satisfied feeling and later she made a show of enthusiasm when Blossom brought her a loaf of hot bread just before noon.

"It's salt-rising bread," Blossom said. "I don't know if you like it, Miz Hall."

"I've never had any."

"If you don't I'll bake some yeast bread next time."

But Hilda did like the strong, sour-smelling bread, and as she sat at luncheon with Clay at a small table on the screened-in back porch she told him: "I'm buying bread from Blossom, Clay, and I'm going to buy cake and whatever else I can. I think we ought to help them out that much."

"All right," Clay said absently, and when he had finished eating he leaned across the table toward her and his thoughts cast shadows in his eyes. "Hilda, we've got to make a success of this."

"I know we have."

"We have to make this ranch pay." He followed her to the kitchen as she began clearing off the dishes, and helped her wash them at the sink. "If we don't, I don't know what we're going to do."

"We will, Clay."

"I want to learn enough about ranching so that I won't have to go to the Senator for advice. I worked on the ranch every summer when I was here before, but it was only fun to me. I didn't try to learn much about the technique of it. — You know, the department of agriculture issues bulletins on cattle ranching. I think I'll send for some."

"Yes, of course." Hilda gazed out the window, the dish-mop motionless in her hand. "Clay, what if the ranch does pay?"

What if you sell the cattle at a top price? What will you get out of it?"

"You mean from the Senator?"

"Yes."

"Why, I haven't talked about that with him. He hasn't said anything about it."

"Don't you think you ought to have it understood?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I never thought about it."

"Clay, I wish you wouldn't be so vague." She threw the dish-mop into the sink. "Damn it, don't you know you have to look out for yourself?"

"Well, he's my grandfather, Hilda."

"And he'll treat you just like Melvin Coleman if you let him. Ten dollars a month! He'll offer you ten dollars a month, Clay, don't you see?" She whirled past him and ran out of the room and when Clay followed after a moment he found her lying on the bed, sobbing.

"Hilda!"

"Let me alone."

He dropped on his knees beside the bed and drew the palm of one hand over her blonde hair. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. — Nothing at all." She sat up, throwing her hair back with a jerk of her head. "Clay, you mustn't put everything on my shoulders. I have to worry about everything. It isn't fair."

"But there's nothing to worry about."

"No?" she said tonelessly. "All right, let's finish the dishes."

Back in the kitchen Clay did not talk, and she avoided looking at him. She was adapting herself to new surroundings, he thought; she was nervous because of that, and because the operation had been so recent.

Clay wrote a letter to the government printing office in Washington and that afternoon they borrowed Melvin's high-seated roadster and drove to the village of Briar Forks, at the base of a hill three miles from the ranch. They talked little on the ride to town. Hilda sat erect on the bouncing seat gazing ahead with eyes that were fixed and lustreless, and Clay was puzzled at her

mood and irritated because of it. He drove the old car as fast as he could along the rough road, and he too stared into the distance. The first building that come to view at Briar Forks was the school-house, a two-storied brick building quite modern in appearance, but with red-painted out-houses behind it. They crossed the railroad track along which a train travelled twice a week and drove past the loading corrals to the main street which formed a T shape with the highway, ending at the railroad station. Clay stopped at the general store, and men glanced curiously at them, with smiles at Hilda's bright yellow jacket and jodhpurs, as they went into the store. George Osgood, the store-keeper, remembered Clay and came forward from the row of letterboxes of the post office in the rear. They stood in the gloom of the store, beside a stack of axe handles, and Osgood was very hearty, eyeing Hilda as she walked along the counter looking at the merchandise.

"Glad to have you back again, Clay, and your wife," Osgood said. "We heard tell you were going to run the ranch. — Can I do anything for you, Mrs. Hall ?"

"I wanted to get something to make curtains with," Hilda said, moving her head to avoid a coil of fly-paper hanging from the ceiling.

"Curtains ? Well, let's see. Well, there's some mosquito netting. How would that do ?"

Clay smiled and while he was choosing a pair of overalls and some blue cotton shirts he heard Osgood's rather shocked exclamation : "But that's for dresses, Mrs. Hall. It's kind of dear for curtains. It wasn't meant for curtains at all."

"It's what I want, though," Hilda said.

Clay went out to the car and drove it down the street to the garage and smithy. When he returned with the tank filled with gasoline Hilda was waiting at the edge of the boardwalk. Osgood carried out a bundle and put it in the car, then held the door open for Hilda.

"Clay," Osgood said. "Why don't you come over some night and gropple fer catfish in the Brazos with us ? Night before last I caught a ten pound cat."

"Maybe I'll do that," Clay said, as he drove slowly away.

"What does he mean, grapple?" Hilda asked.

"Grapple. — They light torches and wade in the water and catch catfish with their hands."

"Don't they get cut?"

"They get their hands scarred sometimes."

"Clay, I bought a cute sun-suit for Louise, the Coleman's baby, and I really did find some stuff to make curtains with. I'm going to dye it." She was smiling again and Clay looked at her fondly ; the resentment between them was forgotten.

Blossom dressed Louise in the sun-suit at once and put her in the cardboard carton under the mulberry tree.

"Now I can't let you pay me fer the bread, Miz Hall," she said. "I just can't."

"Why not? That was a business arrangement, Blossom. I want you to bake a cake for me some time, too."

"I'll be pleased to do it, Miz Hall, if'n you'll take it as a present from me, to make up fer Louise."

"Of course," Hilda said. "Thank you, Blossom."

There were many things for them to do. Clay sawed wood and split it for the stove, and he and Hilda together gathered flowers on the slope across the creek, in the twilight when the radiance of the sun was diffused and spread in an even amber glow : Indian blankets and verbena and foxglove and phlox. In the creek bed they found fossils, the spiral coils of ammonites, which they used as door weights. Hilda was forever re-arranging the furniture and she spent hours dyeing the curtains a brilliant yellow, measuring and basting them. That second night they sat on the fence after dinner as the light faded and the stars appeared, and identified the constellations, and the next day with red itching skin Hilda had discovered what chigres were. Blossom brought some fat salt bacon and told Hilda to rub it on the spot where the chigre had entered the skin and the pain was eased by it.

The next day Hilda rode with Clay to repair the water-gap in the east pasture. Clay saddled the dun horse for her and he rode the wind-broken bay ; Melvin had hitched the small black mare with the mule to cut the green field of kafir corn. When Hilda

galloped the dun horse with her yellow hair flying, Clay did not force the bay, and she waited for him on a hilltop by the feeding bins. Once over the hill, out of sight of the ranch-house, the country was wild and there was no human habitation to be seen. The creek flowed in the hollow of the land, sometimes in a bare gully with sharp banks and no trees, fringed with sere tufts of grass and ragweed. The grass was tall, in feathery seed, and the cob cactus bloomed purple on the slopes. They rode slowly, inspecting the cattle, on the way to the water-gap, which they approached along the creek, over sloping shelves of sand. Hilda dismounted and sat by a deep pool while Clay repaired the hanging water-gap. She watched quick scarlet flights of a crested cardinal among the swinging arcs of grape-vine, against the deep dark green of the close grove of pecan and oak trees. Beyond, through the trees, she glimpsed a wide band of blue, and when they rode away she turned her horse along a cattle path through the woods toward it. They found a blue meadow, with blue-bonnets growing thick as clover. The country seemed so welcoming and kindly that she said : "Clay, I'm beginning to feel at home here now." And Clay felt a warm tight constriction in his throat, seeing her gay and smiling on the dun horse, in brown jodhpurs and brass-buttoned yellow jacket, and with her yellow hair falling to her shoulders. He moved the bay horse nearer her and they rode hand in hand down the long green slope toward the de-horning squeeze and the pasture gate.

Hilda was still convalescent, but she insisted that she not be treated as an invalid. She rode with Clay, she did the major part of the work around the house, and she grew steadily stronger. A few days later, when Amon Hall returned to the ranch with Olivia, there was color in her cheeks and she was becoming tanned by the sun. She had a new-found vitality, a nervous energy that kept her always active, so that Clay had to warn her to take a siesta in the middle of the day.

Amon telephoned from Rutherford that he was coming, and Clay met the car at the gate. Olivia, under Amon's impatient urging, drove on toward the house without waiting for Clay to jump on the running board. Her bright blue eyes were apolo-

getic when Clay came up to the house, but Amon said : "You're young enough not to mind that little walk, Clay." He had been a pioneer automobile owner in the days when every trip was an adventure, when it was commonplace to drive home on the rim, and he had always felt that a car in motion should not be disturbed.

"How is everything, Clay ? How are those cattle ? Have you got the de-horning done yet ?"

"No. Melvin's been cutting the kafir corn."

"Oh, yes. Well, it's best to get that finished with."

It was late afternoon and Amon decided that it was too soon before dark to ride, so he took Clay with him on one of his methodical inspection tours of the ranch buildings and the crops. Olivia went into the house with Hilda, looked around her, and said : "You've done a lot, I see." There was reluctant approval in her tone. "Where did you get the curtains ?"

"At Briar Forks. I dyed them myself."

"Did you ?" Olivia said, feeling the material with her finger-tips. They were impractical for a ranch-house, she thought, expensive. She went through the house, and exclaimed over the changes Hilda had made with real appreciation. They went upon the porch, from where they could see Clay and Amon walking down the lane toward the field of kafir corn, their shadows long grotesque shapes ahead of them, and Hilda said : "I'm going to light a cigarette. Do you mind ?"

"No," Olivia said. "Of course not." She was shocked ; she had never approved of women smoking. But as she watched the match flare and the first puff of smoke from the cigarette, she remembered Mark Hall's wife coming free and casual into the yellow house in Rutherford after the honeymoon. She remembered with a sharp pang of regret the antagonism there had always been toward her. She said quietly, after taking a long breath : "But don't let Papa see you smoking, please."

"I thought I'd better not."

Olivia smiled. "When people get older they believe in being frank, Hilda. Papa isn't easy to get along with, and I want you to be careful. I had my mind made up that I wasn't going

to like you, and I suppose Papa feels that way, too." Olivia looked not at Hilda, but off toward the corn field, her face turned away. "It was like that with Clay's mother, when his father brought her home. She got off on the wrong foot."

"Oh," Hilda said, and Olivia glanced at her fleetingly.

"It was only that she was too gay for Papa, you see, and Mark and I had always been so close together that I was jealous. But I'm not going to be jealous of you, Hilda. You see, I'm being frank. I think you'll make Clay a good wife, and it makes me very happy. I mean that, my dear."

"Thank you, Olivia."

"Clay has always been a son to me. I don't know whether you know that." Olivia went to a rocking chair and began to rock deliberately, with her hands in her lap. "His mother died when he was very young and I took him under my wing. I never had a child. . ." Olivia's blue eyes turned away darkly and she gazed out across the prairie. "I protected Clay all I could, Hilda. I fought for him as well as I was able, and it was my idea for him to go to France. I wanted him to be a painter, too, and I told him not to come home unless he had to." She sighed. "It's hard to tell a stranger what it means, but all of us, my mother, Clay's father, me and Clay, all of us — we've never been able to stand on our own feet. When I was a little girl — you wouldn't believe it now, Hilda — but I had a lot of spunk."

"You still have, Olivia," Hilda said. "I'm proud of you."

"Oh, you don't need to say that, Hilda. I wasn't fishing." Olivia laughed. "But I did. Once I ran away from home." She turned toward Hilda and her blue eyes were bright as jewels. "That was a long time ago, Hilda, I'd rather not say how long it was. But there weren't any automobiles and to catch a train for Dallas you had to get up at four in the morning and ride to the station in the livery rig with the oil lamps burning. — And that's exactly what I did. I was fifteen years old then and I wanted a pair of red shoes. They seemed daring to me and the color red was like waving a flag and declaring my independence. I did it, anyway, and I went to Dallas and I bought the shoes, Hilda,

and I didn't intend ever to come home again." The creaking of Olivia's rocker timed her sentences and her hands were clasped together in her lap. "But a friend of the family, old Colonel Soward, saw me and he put me on the train for home and sent a telegram and Papa was at the station to meet me. He didn't say a word. He met me in the surrey and all the way home he kept flicking the horses with the whip until they were near galloping. At supper time he didn't speak and he wouldn't let my mother talk to me and right after supper he took me to prayer meeting. I had on the new red shoes and they hurt my feet and he made me walk a mile and a half to church and a mile and a half back again. I cried and begged him to let me take the shoes off and go barefoot, but he wouldn't. — After that, Hilda, whenever I felt like standing up to Papa, I thought of those red shoes."

Olivia stopped rocking and turned to Hilda with a slight frown, her lips pursed. "But I don't want to put Papa in the wrong light, Hilda. It isn't that he's unfair or cruel. He just has very set ideas that he's followed all his life, and he wants all of us to follow them too. He can't understand why we should think any differently than he does ; I suppose he thinks it's disloyal. He simply doesn't understand people at all. He was real fond of Mark, Clay's father, but he always made Mark unhappy and he couldn't call his soul his own. Why, Mark bought an automobile once and he didn't dare tell Papa about it, so he kept it in a rented garage a half a mile from the house and for two years Papa never found out. And when he did he was very angry. He always thought Mark was foolish. He used to write a little verse, and Papa never approved of that. — And there was a beau of mine, Hilda, that Papa never approved of because he had a bananawood buggy . . ." Olivia's voice trailed off for an instant, then she said firmly : "Hilda, I want you to help Clay. You have the character to do it. I want you to encourage him to oppose his grandfather when he ought to."

"I will," Hilda said. "Oh, I've tried already, Olivia."

They exchanged glances and then Olivia said quietly, in a diminishing voice : "Well, keep trying, dear." She stood up. "Hilda, we'd better get supper ready. Papa will want butter-

milk. Will you get it from Blossom?" So, very apparently, Olivia retired again behind the smouldering reserve of her blue eyes, and she talked little when they were in the kitchen together. There was not enough room for them all on the back porch, so Hilda set the large oak table in the middle room of the house, between the two bedrooms, and at supper Amon drank nearly a quart of buttermilk and ate several pieces of toast. He was in a buoyant mood. His small eyes shone behind his spectacles and the iron-gray bristles of his moustache turned up in a smile. His hair was nearly white but his eyebrows and moustache were a darker tone, accountable for the more youthful expression of his face.

"That kafir corn will make good feed, Clay," he said. "But I tell you, it's a good thing I didn't plant any cotton. Now that we're shy of rain it's better to have that ready cash in hand."

Hilda looked at Clay, but he avoided her eyes, and Amon said : "We need rain real soon to save the corn. It hasn't been so dry as this since 1930, the summer after you went away, Clay."

"It would be hard on Melvin if his corn crop didn't come through," Clay said. "He was counting on the money from the corn to buy a new car."

"Buy a car!" Amon cried. "What foolishness is that?"

"Another second-hand car," Clay said. "He's going to trade the one he's got for it and put up a little cash."

"Melvin can't afford a car as it is," Amon said, frowning as he thought of the day he had found Mark Hall in the town square in the car he had not known about, feeling again the anger because Mark had kept it hidden from him for two years.

"How much did the government pay you for not planting cotton, Senator?" Hilda asked in a crisp, clear tone.

"How much?" Amon peered at her from under shaggy eyebrows, his eyes searching her face. "Not very much, but cash money though."

"Let's go out on the piazza," Clay said, standing up and pushing his chair noisily back. He lingered behind and caught Hilda's arm, whispering : "If you say anything to him about Melvin he'll never forgive you."

"Well, are you going to?"

"In time, yes. When I can bring it up in a natural way."

Olivia turned back toward the kitchen. "Clay, I'm going to help with the dishes. You go and talk to Papa."

"Yes, go on," Hilda said.

Clay hesitated in the doorway, trying to catch her eye, but she turned her back and ran the faucet full force into the sink. Clay went out to the porch where his grandfather was sitting, with a straw between his teeth, rocking contentedly on the creaking floorboards.

"Clay, it's mighty comforting to sit and look out on land that belongs to you," he said. "The older you get the more it seems to mean to you. — I remember when I first came to Texas I could hardly bide my time until I could get hold of some real estate. I had this ranch picked out from the first and as soon as I was able I bought it. — I tell you it's a comfort for a man to have a retreat like this with the world the way it is today, with a lot of crazy fools running it, and with as many thieves as there are horseflies." He bit down hard on the straw between his teeth and spat the severed pieces to the floor.

"Senator," Clay said. "We haven't talked much about my running the ranch. I wanted . . ."

"Oh, you can do it all right, boy. I'll keep an eye on you and tell you what to do. Now the first thing is to tend to de-horning those calves. And they ought to be castrated too. A bull calf gets a staggy look if you let it go too long and that reduces his value on the market. And de-horning will increase the value of a steer 50 cents on the hundred pounds in the feeder market, Clay."

"I meant to say that we haven't talked about any arrangement between us," Clay said persistently.

"Oh, I see. You mean you want to know what you're going to get out of it?" Amon pursed his lips.

"Yes."

"Well, that's a fair question, Clay. You'll be taken care of. You don't need to worry about that."

"I wasn't concerned about it."

"No, of course not. — Right now, Clay, I'm short of ready cash. I tell you, money is scarce. — And I had some money stolen from me, Clay, outright stolen from me." He banged his fist on the arm of his rocker and his spectacles slid a trifle lower on his nose. "But I'm going to bring suit, Clay. I'm going to pester and harass them until they pay me off." He nodded his head vigorously, belched in a satisfied manner, and lapsed into silence. His lips still moved writhingly, and he bit at his moustache, but he did not speak.

A few moments later, when Olivia and Hilda came upon the porch, the sun was setting behind the hills and misty purple shadows rolled down the long slopes. They all sat watching the sunset and listening to the croaking of bullfrogs in the creek down below. From the distance came the sound of a cowbell as Melvin drove the milch cows in from the pasture, and Amon said in a strangely gentle tone : "When I was a boy I used to help drive the cows in this time of night, only sundown came sooner in those Tennessee hills. I remember once — Clay, listen to this — I remember once in the spring after the rains a cow was standing in the creek and the bottom gave way and she fell through. There was another stream of water there underneath and the bottom of the creek was plumb hollow. — Clay, that goes to show you never can tell what kind of trouble an animal's liable to get into. You want to watch them all the time. Now that the dry season's here they're apt to get bones in their throats. Sometimes, you know, they find a skeleton in the grass and they chew at the bones and swallow them and they stick in their throats. You can hear them wheezing when it happens, Clay."

Amon talked on aimlessly for an hour about ranch work. He told Clay to ride the fences carefully, to make sure that the corner posts were stable and well-braced. "The life of a fence depends on the corner posts," he said. He told him that in de-horning calves he must take a quarter inch circle of skin with the horn so that a smooth poll would be formed in healing, and to "slap on plenty of pine tar to keep off screw worm."

"You've got to keep on the alert, Clay," he said. "There are

lots of things to remember, feed and salt and water supply and so forth. You ought to allow a couple of pounds of salt a month for each head of cattle, and keep it away from the creeks and water tanks or they'll graze it too fine there. And when you want to change their grazing habits, just move the salt somewhere else. And above all, Clay ; don't you work with those steers more than you have to. A steer on the grass ought to be left alone just as much as possible if he's to put on weight."

Hilda had gone to sleep, curled up, with her head on Clay's lap, and when Amon announced that he was going to bed she could hardly keep awake long enough to help Olivia prepare the extra beds, one for Olivia in the second bedroom and a cot for Amon in the dining room. But long after she had gone to bed she was awakened in the night by a stirring sound and saw a white figure in the darkness on the piazza as the old man voided his bladder with a splattering noise into the night. Hilda moved her shoulders in distaste and pressed her face into the pillow.

Amon was cheerful at breakfast the next morning. He did not complain about Hilda's coffee, although he peered up at her after taking the first sip and then poured a great deal of cream in the cup.

"What a smiling day," he said expansively. "Clay, I reckon I'll ride out with you and see the herd today. I want to look over that de-horning squeeze, too."

"It's in good condition," Clay said. "I nailed it up the other day."

"You did ?" Amon looked at him with a pleased smile and put one hand on Clay's shoulder as they went out into the yard. "Now where is Melvin ?" he said. "That boy is lazy, Clay. A farmer ought to be up before daybreak, but yonder he is just having breakfast. — Melvin !"

Melvin pushed open the screen door. "Yes, Senator ?"

"What's the matter ? You oversleep this morning ?"

"No. I got the small chores done. I done milked."

"Well, when you drive up your team drive the other horses in too. I'm going to ride today — that old bay, I suppose."

"All right, Senator."

"Melvin, do you reckon you'll be able to finish harvesting that kafir corn today."

"That's as may be, Senator," Melvin said. "I'll try."

"Good. Then you and Clay can start de-horning those calves."

Melvin came out of the log house, putting on his straw hat, and Amon nodded to Blossom's pale anxious face at the doorway as he turned aside. "Clay, let's see if we can find some eggs," he said, and again he was off on his indefatigable inventory of his property. Clay went with him, and they looked in the hay where Amon suggested there might be nests. They had gathered half a dozen eggs when they heard Melvin calling to them.

"What do you reckon he wants?" Amon said sharply. "Go on, Clay, there must be more eggs here. Look yonder the other side of that reaper."

"Say, Senator." Melvin appeared at the barn door. "Something seems to be wrong with that there mule."

"What do you mean, Melvin?"

"He's laying yonder under a tree." Melvin jerked his thumb over his shoulder, with a quiet, clinical inspection of Amon's face.

The old man hurried from the barn, stiffly, his hands held wide from his sides and his head thrust forward. His stiff knees moved jerkily as he kept pace with Melvin. They went through the corral into the cow pasture and a hundred yards away from the fence they found the mule lying under a stunted post oak tree.

"Why, he's dead," Amon exclaimed. "Why, I believe he's dead."

"I'm scared he is," Melvin said.

"But it can't be, that fine mule dead," Amon cried. The mule lay on one side with its hoofs extended straight out, exposing the pinkish-colored belly. "Now what could have happened to him?"

"When I drove the cows up last night I seen him running as pretty as you please," Melvin said. "He was just running, I don't know why."

"That's a shame," Amon said. "That was a fine mule. —

Clay, take hold of that off leg and let's turn him over. Good mules don't just up and die. There must be some reason for it."

"Stand aside, Senator," Melvin said. "Clay and me will do it."

But the old man gripped the dead mule's hock and together he and Clay turned the body over. The head was bent far under and it became apparent that the animal's neck was broken.

"Well, well," Melvin said. "I can see it plain now. It must have been when I seen him running that he fell and broke his neck, Senator."

Amon stood with his hands clenched behind his back looking at the mule, saying : "What next, I wonder? — That was a fine mule, Melvin, as good a worker as ever I had. I tell you, I hate to lose him. Why, he was young, he was good for a half a dozen years more work. Isn't that right, Melvin?"

"He shore was, Senator."

Amon pulled his hat down lower over his eyes and turned his back to the mule, staring away across the plain. After a moment he said quietly : "Melvin, you'd better hitch the mare to the wagon and drag the carcass off to the boneyard."

"I'll do that, Senator."

Amon went and leaned against the corral fence, still looking at the mouse-colored heap under the stunted tree. When Melvin drove the other horses up they snorted and with pricked ears and startled eyes bolted away from the tree. As Melvin was hitching the black mare to the wagon Amon said : "You've got to finish that kafir corn, Melvin. I reckon you'll have to harness the dun horse up with the mare."

"That's the only decent saddle-horse we have, Senator," Clay protested.

"But that bay is wind-broken. No, we'll have to use the dun." Amon turned away and walked back to the house, and when he was fifty feet from the back porch he called : "Olivia! — Olivia, that mule is dead."

"Dead, Papa?" They saw her white hair at the window.

"Fell and broke his neck." Amon stopped in the tall grass outside the window, looking up over the bending blooms of sun-

flowers at her. "Now ain't that the damnedest luck ! I needed that mule."

"Senator, you ought to get another team," Clay said. "The mare and the dun horse ought to be left for saddle use."

"Get another team, Clay ? Horses cost money, don't you know that ?" Amon stamped on to the porch.

"Couldn't you pick up a team around here ?" Clay asked, following him. "Over at Briar Forks ?"

"Nonsense, Clay. We can get along as it is. Another day's work will finish that kafir corn and then there'll be the mare and the dun to ride, as well as that old bay. We can get along without a team until the fall anyhow. — There's no point to laying out cash money for a team if you can do without it, Clay."

From the piazza Amon watched Melvin drag the mule's carcass behind the wagon to the boneyard, a gully a half a mile from the house where the eroded land before could nurture neither crops nor browse but where the grass now grew lush and deep, fertilized by the flesh of many animals. Later buzzards appeared and circled in the still air above, soaring, hovering above the boneyard until one by one they dropped to the ground. Amon, seeing them, got to his feet.

"Clay, Melvin will have to use the horses to harvest that kafir corn. I'm going back to town." He went into the house and put on his coat, calling to Olivia, flatly saying : "Get ready, we're going back to Rutherford."

"But, Papa, so soon — "

"Right away, Olivia, you hear."

And five minutes later Clay and Hilda stood on the piazza and watched the car from sight on the white road. They exchanged long glances, then Clay shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

IX

SOON after sunrise the telephone rang — twice long, once short — and Clay sat up in bed. The night had lifted, but there was not yet color in the air as he went barefooted to the telephone on the wall in the kitchen and picked up the receiver. A voice

asked for Melvin Coleman, and Clay shouted to Melvin, then returned to bed. He heard Melvin's voice ringing into the mouthpiece, then a long pause, then a hearty "shore glad to have you," and after a few moments Melvin hung up and went out to the barn to milk the cows. Clay turned over, grateful for the silence, and slept again.

Blossom Coleman had peered eagerly from the window of the log house and as Melvin started for the barn, he called, with gay roguish affection in his tone : "Gal, we're goin' to have company."

With little happening between them in the routine of ranch life, they both took pleasure in the slightest departure from routine, so that Melvin did not at once tell her what was to happen, but prolonged the news, teasing her in the old manner of courtship. His tone was the one he used when he sometimes said : "Gal, why don't you wear that black silk underwear once in a while ?" When he knew that in her bureau drawer there were only cotton garments with arms elbow-length and legs knee-length and buttons down the front. She played her role with him, begging for the news as she built up the fire in the stove. But he would not tell her until after he had milked, he said, and finally she went to the barn and stood with her arms folded over the top rail of the fence, waiting in silence.

"Gal," he said at last with his cheek against the smooth grain of the cow's hide. "It's a preacher, Brother Williams and his wife. He's a mighty fine preacher."

"Oh," Blossom said.

"I knowed him out in West Texas, when we was out to the oil fields," Melvin said, not noticing her disappointment. "Says he's on his way back from the Baptist convention in the city and says he's going to preach in church over to Briar Forks tomorrow. He'll stay the night with us."

"That will be fine," Blossom said. "Melvin, reckon we ought to ask him to pray fer rain ?"

"I reckon I will. Shore. Why not ?"

Blossom brought water from the windmill and scrubbed the rough puncheon floors of the old house. She prepared the

double bed for the minister and his wife, folding across it a crazy quilt she had pieced together before her marriage, for her hope chest, and she made up the single bed in the small room for Melvin and herself. When she took the morning milk to Hilda she remained shyly in the doorway for a moment, at length said : "We're going to have company tonight, Miz Hall — a preacher and his wife. He's a fine preacher, Melvin says."

"Company ?" Hilda said. "Where are you going to put them ?"

"We got a spare bed."

"There's room here in the house, Blossom, if you want to put them here."

"No, ma'am." Blossom shook her head. She had not entertained since she had married Melvin and moved to the log house on Briar Creek and she wanted her company for herself. "We got room enough, Miz Hall. — But I would appreciate it, I shore would, if you'd make me the loan of some dishes."

"Of course. Take whatever you need."

She went with Blossom to the cupboard and took down some yellow plates and cups that Olivia had brought from the house in Rutherford.

"But them are your best," Blossom said.

"They're to be used, not to be looked at."

"But I'm afeard I'd break one."

"It doesn't matter if you do, Blossom. I have plenty of them. Go ahead, take all you need."

All through the day Hilda saw Blossom busily at work, sweeping, dusting, scouring. In the afternoon Melvin drove the team back to the barn and told Clay he had finished cutting the kafir corn. Then he put on new overalls and a clean shirt. The preacher was expected at five o'clock, but at six, when Clay and Hilda had their supper on the back porch, he had not come. They heard Blossom call : "Melvin, it's six o'clock," and later, "Are you shore he said today, Melvin ? It's six-thirty. — I don't know what to think."

A little before seven o'clock a new sedan automobile turned in at the red gate and Melvin went to meet it, but Blossom did

not leave the house until the car had stopped before it and the preacher and his wife got out. With them was a pale boy about three years old, dressed in khaki shorts and a white shirtwaist. Hilda went shamelessly to the window to peek at them. She saw Melvin greet the minister with a grave show of dignity and put one hand on the little boy's head to praise him. Then Blossom came out of the house with Louise in her arms saying in her high voice before Melvin had made the introductions: "I'm shore glad to know you-all."

"This is Brother Tom Williams, Blossom, and Missus Williams and little Tom," Melvin said, grinning.

The minister had a thatch of black hair that fell forward over his forehead, a long serious face and bright intense eyes. He was tall and loose-jointed and moved easily about with the sure manner of a self-centered man who does not see beyond superficialities. Standing beside Melvin he seemed frail, although Melvin was as thin as he, and as tall. But Melvin's face was weathered, his hands rough and red and spread at the joints from work.

Mrs. Williams had the tight alert expression of a woman several years older than her husband. Her eyes were squinted a little as she watched him turn his attention to the baby with the studied wisdom of the politician and the preacher, poking its ribs with a long forefinger. Melvin said, grinning: "How do you like my fine boy, Brother Tom?" Then Blossom explained, when the minister asked its name, that she was a girl — Louise, and Melvin laughed.

The preacher tickled the baby, took it from Blossom up in his arms and tossed it. She stood watching with a shy smile until after a moment, a hostess again, she bent to the pale little boy, saying: "My, ain't that a cunning suit you got on." The child twisted away from her, whining, and pressed against his mother's skirts.

They all went into the house and a moment later Blossom hurried over to the ranch-house and called to Hilda.

"Miz Hall, I wonder if you could let me have a little milk back," she whispered. "One of them milch cows is fixin' to

have a calf and the milk ain't fit to drink. I didn't know the little boy was coming."

"Yes, I have plenty," Hilda said.

"And I want you to meet Brother Williams, Miz Hall."

Hilda and Clay were led out into the yard and shook hands with the minister, and Hilda was somewhat ashamed of the way he made advances to them, ignoring the Colemans, asking about the ranch and about Senator Hall, and she was glad to escape again to the ranch-house.

After supper Melvin carried Louise into the yard and put her in the cardboard carton and then sat with the minister on the running board of the sedan. From the kitchen Blossom listened to their conversation, the long and measured pauses. The preacher asked to see the farm and they walked into the twilight, to circle the windmill and the henhouse and return unobtrusively to the object of their polite artifice, the privy near the fence. In the meantime the pale boy sat in the dusty Bermuda grass, playing solemnly with a spiral fossil from the creek which Blossom used for a door weight.

Mrs. Williams helped with the dishes, and when the work was done Blossom set up the crib for the pale boy to sleep in next to the double bed in the minister's room. Melvin brought buckets of water from the windmill and they prepared for bed in the yellow glow of oil lamps. Blossom and her husband slept in the cramped single bed with the baby between them, and later, when all was quiet and the preacher's snores echoed the sonorous piping of the bullfrogs in the creek, Louise began to cry. Moonlight came into the room as in a well of blackness and lit the narrow bed with a light that seemed to move almost tangibly over the sheet, the sheet which was clammy from their bodies in the heat. At first Blossom thought that a chigre had burrowed into the baby's tender flesh and in the moonlight she examined its skin for any tiny swelling around a minute red speck. But she found nothing.

She sighed and got out of bed. She picked up the baby from the hot moist depression in which it lay and began to walk up

and down on the uneven puncheon floor. The axe marks, broad and flat with the grain of the wood, were pleasant to feel under her bare feet and the baby quieted, as if she had imparted to it the soothing sense of well-being she felt.

Blossom went to the window and looked out at the prairie. In the pale light she could see the hills far away, the rail fence glowing white in the foreground, and the looming shape of the barn. The stars were bright in the summer night, the brilliant stars of Texas like pendant drops of morning dew, and she stood looking at them and listening to the puffing of bullfrogs in the creek. The baby wailed faintly and Blossom smoothed her damp hair, glancing over her shoulder toward the room where the preacher snored.

"Hush, Louise, now hush," she murmured, and leaned against the wall. She was tired, and looked sighingly at the bed where Melvin slept. She paced the puncheon floor, whispering a mother's croon in the baby's ear, but it would not cease crying. Now the cries were hardly separated one from another; there was one prolonged, strangling scream. Melvin sat up in bed and she went toward him when she heard his whisper. He took the baby from her and walked with it, but the change of arms did not soothe Louise.

"Now, Louise," Melvin whispered. "Now, now, Louise."

They both heard through the partition a stir in the next room, the creaking of the bed. Then there came the flare of a match and Blossom saw the minister bending over the lamp, his wife holding open the door.

"Is the baby sick?" Mrs. Williams asked.

"I don't just know," Blossom said, acutely unhappy. "She's a quiet baby most always."

"Maybe she's teething."

"No, it ain't that."

"Let me hold her."

Blossom gave up the baby, with a sense of shame and failure, to the older woman's steady arms and full soft bosom. But the baby's cries became louder, and the preacher came and stood in the

doorway, his spare figure outlined by the lamp in the room behind him, his bare feet spread on the boards of the floor, his shanks shining beneath the wrinkled skirt of his nightshirt.

"I'm right sorry to disturb you," Melvin said.

The preacher blinked his eyes sleepily, and his wife said : "Now I wonder what ails her ?"

"Maybe," Blossom said timidly then — "maybe it's because she misses her crib."

"Oh," Mrs. Williams said. "To be sure," she said in a tight prim tone, with her lips lengthening horizontally. "Of course she shall have her own bed. Tommie can sleep with us."

"I don't want to put you out none," Blossom said as Mrs. Williams lifted the pale boy, his eyes opened wide and solemn, from the crib and put him on the bed. "I'm sure sorry to be a trouble," Blossom murmured as she helped Melvin move the crib to their room.

And then the little boy began to weep, bitterly, stranglingly, prolonging each scream with fierce determination, asserting his injury with fulsome, Job-like egotism. Later, when the boy had been petted to silence and Louise slept sweetly in her crib, Blossom wept into her pillow.

The next morning Blossom put on a new dress which Melvin had helped her select at Briar Forks. It was silk, of a deep-dyed hard pink, and the white slip Blossom wore showed through slits in the material. Melvin was happy to see her in it and praised the dress to everyone. But Blossom saw Mrs. Williams' eyes pass over it with the same expression of sympathy and distaste with which she had looked at the washtubs hanging from nails on the outer wall of the house, at the axe-marked floor and the frayed oilcloth on the table, the crock filled with the ingredients of salt-rising bread on the hearth and the bleak white-washed walls. And seeing the simple black dress the older woman wore Blossom knew that the machine-stitched silk was not right, that the color was not good.

"It's nigger pink," she told herself. "That's what it is. Why didn't I see that before ?"

She went across to the ranch-house to Hilda, saying : "Are

you going to church, Miz Hall ?" and moving in front of Hilda so that she would see the dress.

"No," Hilda said. "That's a new dress you have on, Blossom ?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"It's very pretty."

"Is it now ?" Blossom looked down at the shiny material, then her eyes turned cloudily to Hilda. "But ain't it, well, a little bright, Miz Hall ?"

"Oh, not for summer," Hilda said, and Blossom went back to the log house more contented.

"It is an awful dress," said Clay, who had heard them talking.

"Yes, and she knows it, poor thing."

When Mrs. Williams asked Blossom to ride into town in the sedan she blushed and shyly sought an excuse, but the preacher insisted and Melvin said : "Go on, gal. You don't want to ride in our old model T with that stylish dress on."

So Blossom held open the gate and waited until Melvin had followed the sedan through in the old roadster, with its high quivering body and small engine like a gasoline can perched above the wheels, then she got in the sedan, with Louise in her arms.

The pale, worm-like boy climbed in the front seat with the preacher and Blossom sat beside Mrs. Williams in the back, sinking deep in the cushions with Louise in a bundle of pink blanket held against her. The car moved smoothly along the hard white ruts, in which the old Ford slued from side to side, rocking and jouncing in a frenzy of pounding pistons and rattling fenders.

"This is shore a fine auto," Blossom said. "My, it must cost a lot to keep it up."

"We average twenty miles to the gallon," the preacher said over his shoulder.

"We need a nice car," Mrs. Williams said in her sharp, rather nasal voice. "We drive around such a lot — and it made a good showing in the city."

"We're maybe goin' to git a new car," Blossom said. " — If Melvin makes a good corn crop."

"They don't make 'em any better than this here," the preacher

said. "For the money, that is. It's handsome to look at, it's comfortable to ride in, and it's cheap to run. Why, we've come clean from West Texas and I figure by the time we get back we won't of spent more than thirty-five to forty dollars."

"My," Blossom said, glancing away for fear her face would reveal that Melvin worked four months to earn forty dollars.

"Of course all we have to pay for is gas and oil," the preacher said. He was bent over the steering wheel, his lock of black hair falling over one eye.

"We don't aim to git a car new from the store," Blossom said, the explanation forced honestly to her lips. "I mean new to us. — Melvin aims to put through some kind of a trade, if we make a good crop of corn, that is."

"That's a fine stand of corn you've got, sure enough," the preacher said.

"Uh-huh," Blossom nodded. "But we shore need rain."

They had come over a hill upon a broad plain and across a sweep of sage grass were the houses of the town in the distance.

"The cotton needs rain too," the preacher said, leaning back against the cushion and turning his face half toward Blossom. "In the city we stayed with a man who's a pretty important cotton broker. He was optimistic. Yes, he was optimistic all right, just come a rain."

"Yes, just come rain," Blossom said.

"You folks are lucky," the preacher said. "It's a lot dryer out west, I can tell you."

"Indeed it is," Mrs. Williams said. "I tell you it was good to get away from the heat there."

"Now tonight," the preacher said, leaning farther back. "Now tonight we're going to put up over on the Brazos River with Brother Sam Goodlane. Do you know Brother Sam?"

Blossom shook her head.

"Well, now, Brother Sam is well-fixed. He's got a thousand acre place yonder on the Brazos and I hear tell he's planted four hundred acres of cotton. I look forward to seeing that this evening. We want to get there before sundown."

"It don't matter how much he's got planted," Blossom said. "He's got to have rain, just like we do."

"That's the truth."

"And we shore need it. — Brother Williams, Melvin and me was talking, thinking maybe you'd pray to God fer a little rain."

"Why, I will. Sure I will." The car slowed and the preacher stopped it under a pecan tree, opposite the Baptist church. He got out of the car and stood looking at the square frame building, from which the white paint had been peeled in scabrous strips by the heat. Three stone steps led to a tiny porch, roofed, and supported by two thin columns.

"Shall we go in?" asked Mrs. Williams, but Blossom shook her head. She wanted to sit in the gleaming sedan as the people of the town passed. She wanted them to see her in the elegant automobile, but she did not just then want them to see her new dress. She said softly : "I reckon I'd best set here a while and wait fer Melvin."

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Williams said.

The preacher cleared his throat, and after an indecisive moment put his head in the window.

"Tom, I don't think you need to wait for us," Mrs. Williams said. "Maybe you'd best go on in. If you get through early we can make the Brazos by supper time."

"Yes, that's right." He smiled and bobbed his head to Blossom, then walked across the dusty street. The baby gurgled faintly and Blossom gave her the nipple to suck, holding the celluloid ring to which it was attached. Blossom leaned against the cushion, smiling, with her straw sailor hat tilted at an angle on her head. She watched the congregation passing through the dust, climbing the three stone steps to the crowded porch, edging through the door, and with a smiling, alert face she waited to acknowledge each greeting.

"Goodness, it's getting late," Mrs. Williams said some time later. Blossom looked at the church. There was no one now on the tiny porch and the doors had been closed.

"I can't figure what's keeping Melvin," she murmured.

Mrs. Williams leaned out to look along the bare dusty road. She turned to Blossom with a frown. "Tom always wants me to listen to his sermons. He'd hate to have me miss it."

"You go right on in," Blossom said, wetting her lips. "I'll come as soon as Melvin gits here. Now you go ahead."

"Well — all right."

"Maybe he had a flat."

Mrs. Williams got out of the car and lifted her pale son from the front seat. "It was real kind of you to take us in last night," she said, turning toward Blossom, but looking over her shoulder at the church.

"We was pleased to have you," Blossom said.

"Well — I'll see you after."

Ten minutes later Blossom heard the noise of the old roadster. Inside the church the congregation had been singing a hymn, but the sound had ceased shortly before Melvin came. Blossom got out of the car, nervously clutching Louise, and waited under a tree. She saw that there was grease on Melvin's white shirt and a black stain under one ear. As soon as the shattering noise of the engine had died slowly to silence she cried : "Oh, Melvin, whatever happened to you, now?"

"I'm shore sorry, Blossom." He got stiffly down from the seat. "I put that new carburetor in the other day and I reckon I didn't adjust it right. The gas wouldn't mix good and she wouldn't run. I had to stop and fix it."

"It's already begun," Blossom said. "I think he's even preaching now."

"Come on then," Melvin said, reaching for Louise.

"If you'd just a been here, Melvin, we could of walked in with the preacher. I didn't want to do it without you."

They hurried across the street, and Blossom held open the door for Melvin to precede her into the church. The shaft of sunlight that entered with them and went ahead of them along the aisle sought out the preacher's black head and white face. Several people turned to stare at them and Blossom moved back against the wall. Every seat was taken. Her eyes filled with tears as

she stood with Melvin far at the back of the church, and gradually through the mist of moisture her eyes focussed on the preacher's face. He was looking at her and she saw him smile a brief greeting. Then for the first time she became aware of his voice ; she heard the words he was saying : "There's no need to be down-hearted, folks. The good Lord don't desert us. Sometimes we don't understand His ways, that's true, but there's always plenty to be thankful for."

He looked again toward the back of the church. "We need rain, but we don't need much to save our crops. We've got to trust the Lord to provide it. — Now last night I had the pleasure of staying with one of the good young men of this community, a fine farmer and a godly man, Melvin Coleman, with his fine wife and their beautiful baby daughter, out on Senator Hall's ranch. And I can tell you that Brother Melvin has as good a stand of corn as ever I saw."

Blossom turned her head and saw Melvin's mouth fall open, then his delighted and self-conscious grin. His free hand pressed hers, while he held Louise up against his breast with the other.

"And now, brothers and sisters, let's get down on our knees and pray to the Lord for the rain that's so sore needed. . . ."

Later Blossom stood with Melvin by a crab-apple tree near the church, smiling happily as she heard him talk, the center of a changing little group. She listened proudly to his words, and now the pink silk dress seemed as fine, as beautiful, as when she had bought it at the store. She heard Melvin saying again and again : "Shore, he's a brilliant preacher, ain't he ? I hear tell he's goin' to git a call to Rutherford, or maybe Fort Worth." And : "They're right kindly people — stayed the night with us. — Shore, I knowed him a long time back, out in West Texas. They say he'll be the greatest preacher in the state, give him time. He's a young man yet."

When hardly anyone was left at the church, after in groups of two and three the congregation had scattered along the tree-lined street, Blossom glanced across the road and saw that the shiny sedan was gone. She had not seen the minister leave the church.

"Look, Melvin." She touched his arm. "I don't see their auto. It looks like they've up and gone."

"Shore enough?" Melvin turned his long, creased neck and saw the roadster standing alone beneath the pecan tree.

"Well, I did think they'd say goodbye," Blossom said. "I did now."

"Well—" Melvin frowned, then shrugged his shoulders. He walked across the street, his boots scuffing in the dust, and Blossom went beside him. Just before they reached the car he said suddenly, decisively: "They had to hurry on, Blossom. They wanted to reach the Brazos River by sundown."

"By supper time," Blossom said tartly.

"But like as not they tried to catch our eye."

Blossom took Louise and climbed to the seat, and Melvin went to crank the car. The throttle was advanced and the engine roared. He climbed up beside Blossom and just before pressing the gear pedal he said slowly: "Well, Blossom, he was a mighty fine preacher and a mighty fine man. — It's nice to of knowned him."

Blossom nodded and it was not until several minutes later when the old car was travelling more quietly along a smooth part of the plains road that she said: "I don't know. Now I wonder. — Melvin, does he say things like that about everybody he stays the night with, do you reckon?"

But to Hilda Blossom showed no indication of her disappointment. All she said was: "He prayed fer rain, Miz Hall. I shore hope something comes of it. Religion is a comfort, ain't it?"

x

STILL no rain came, and the tips of the plains grass turned brown and withered in the sun whose dry white heat seemed to melt away the pigments of the land. When Clay rode the pastures he found the cattle seeking relief from the heat in the timber, in the muddied creek, and even in the concrete tanks to which the windmills could not feed water fast enough to offset evaporation and the thirst of the herd.

The vegetables that grew above ground in the garden were seared by the heat and Hilda helped Blossom spray them with water morning and evening, trudging with watering cans up and down the lanes between the tomato plants and the beds of lettuce and the snap-bean vines. The wind was always from the south, a warm full wind that enveloped the ranch without invigoration or relief from the heat.

On the day set for de-horning the young steers Amon Hall drove out from Rutherford with Olivia, and Hilda walked with him to the corrals. In the draw between the hills opposite there was a pale blue color where the brilliant field of bluebonnets had crumbled to dust. Amon walked in the deep grass, kicking in it, and grasshoppers leaped from the faint puff of chaff that rose from his toe. He did not talk to Hilda, but went and leaned against the corral gate, frowning and staring at a distant bench of land along which the white-faced Hereford cattle were beginning to straggle into view.

Clay and Melvin had cleared the cattle out of the creek-bed all the way up to the water-gap, and Melvin kept the herd in motion while Clay, who was astride the dun horse, rounded in stragglers and drove reluctant steers out of the soft low ground under shade. Very soon the horses had begun to sweat and Clay's eyes were sore from the glare of the sun on the hard-baked soil. When they drove the herd over the hill and were on the long descending slope toward the corrals and the chute the south wind was in their faces and Clay took off his hat.

"That wind won't cool you, Clay," Melvin said. "Feel it. It's like it blew out of a furnace. — I don't know how long my corn will stand against it. Look, Clay, even from up here you can see the brown in the corn field yonder, and when you come down here it was as green as lawn grass."

"We ought to have rain soon, Melvin," Clay said.

"We shore ought, yes, but it's got to be right away, Clay, to do any good. That corn which ain't already begun to tossle ain't ever goin' to tossle, Clay, I can tell you that."

Amon was waiting at the corrals with a long stick, shouting to turn the herd in at the gate, and when the gate was closed upon

it he leaned against the fence, peering through the bars at the cattle.

"Now those are fine animals, Clay, look at 'em," he said as Clay dismounted by the gate. "Their backs are straight as a carpenter's rule and see the depth of their bodies." He nodded with satisfaction. "Now you and Melvin ride in yonder and cut out those young steers."

Hilda sat on the corral fence watching them cut out the steers and shunt them into the small corral leading to the chute. She was safe above the rush of red bodies, of milling white faces and pink noses, but Amon Hall had gone afoot in among the herd, carrying his long stick, to hold the gate of the smaller corral open.

Olivia had remained at the ranch-house, saying to Hilda : "I've seen cattle de-horned before, and once is enough, dear." But Hilda was curious and now went around to the end of the squeeze where Clay and Melvin were. A young steer had been prodded forward along the chute until its head projected over the stall-like end of the chute, then a curved iron bar had been lowered over its neck, clamping the head in place. Melvin brought a long, scissor-like contrivance and fitted it to one horn of the steer. There was a spurt of blood, a moaning bellow from the steer. Clay slapped pine tar on the wound, and a moment later the other horn had been snipped off, tar applied, and the steer was released to go bounding across the prairie with head down and tail flying, its back folding and opening like a jack-knife. There was dust and confusion and the lowing of cattle, and the smell of blood and tar. Constantly Amon Hall was advising, admonishing : "Careful, now. — Clay, be sure you put plenty of tar on. That keeps the flies that carry screw worms off. — And take about a quarter inch of skin off with the horn, Melvin, you hear ?"

The steers for de-horning had been segregated in the small corral and the old man turned to Hilda, saying : "Now you can do something too, young lady. Run open the gate to the big corral and let the herd loose. There's no need to keep those cattle here away from the grass."

Hilda did as she was told, and then walked on to the ranch-

house, away from the dust and the blood and the shouting at the chute. Olivia said when she saw Hilda's white face : "Sometimes it seems right cruel the treatment they have to give to dumb animals in running a ranch."

"Oh, I don't mind. I suppose it's necessary."

"Just to make meat on the table," Olivia said. "One minute they coddle them like babies to make them fat, then they hack them and scar them and cut them like butchers. Just to make meat on the table. A lot of it seems unnecessary."

Toward noon it was very hot, but Amon Hall did not leave the de-horning squeeze. He had tied a handkerchief around his neck above the stiff collar he always wore and he watched the operation upon every steer driven into the chute. Occasionally he leaned over to stir the mixture of pine tar and linseed oil in the bucket ; he was always officially observant. He estimated the weight and condition of each steer that went by. There were three calves under six months old which needed to be castrated and Melvin wielded the emasculator while Clay gripped the animal's head through the bars of the chute, twisting its neck against the side. Its feet had been roped. Amon stood at Melvin's elbow, leaning forward and bombarding him with advice, and Amon smeared pine tar on the wound.

"Now, Clay," he said later as they were walking back to the house, Clay leading the dun horse. "For the next few days you've got to keep a sharp eye on those steers. We don't want them to get a screw worm. You can tell it by a swelling or any sign of fresh blood. — If there's even one drop of blood you want to watch out."

Amon stopped in the lane and put his fists on his hips, looking at the corn field with a somewhat vindictive curl of his lips. "Well, it don't look like Melvin's going to buy that new car, does it ?" He grunted. "A good rain may save it, though, and we may be eating roasting ears after all, Clay."

Amon did not think to wash his hands and he went to luncheon with a splatter of blood dried on his fingers which because of his failing eyesight he did not notice. He ate heartily, although

Olivia cautioned him about his diet. "A man can't do a day's work on buttermilk and crackers," he said, and after a moment looked at Hilda. "Well, young lady, how do you like ranch life?"

"Not that part of it," Hilda said.

Amon chuckled. "Why, they don't hardly feel it. They get out in the pasture and they lick each other's wounds and that's the end of it. — But, Clay, you look out for them."

"Yes, I will," Clay promised wearily.

Amon leaned back, wiping his lips with a napkin. "Clay, those cattle look to be in good condition. They're starting to put on weight now. In the late fall we'll start them in on cotton-seed cake and fatten them up for the March market. I don't see why it shouldn't be a good year, boy."

After luncheon, sitting on the porch as he waited for drowsiness to overcome him, the old man was in an expansive mood, drawling with a straw between his teeth: "With cattle you know where you stand, Clay. It's not like stocks and bonds. All you have to do is saddle a horse and go out and look at your investment, and you can tell every day just where you stand. You can see the increment. You can count your cattle and see the fat grow on them and watch the market and know just what you're about. A man's a fool to put his money in stocks and bonds, Clay."

It was very hot and Hilda had left the dishes until later. She sat on the edge of the piazza with a sunflower in her hand, listening to the old man's slow conversation with Clay.

"Right after the crash I bought stock, Clay," he said. "I figured then that the worst was over and I'd buy in at the bottom. I bought some copper stock at 98 and waited for it to go up, but it went down instead. I guess there wasn't any bottom after all. That was in 1930, Clay, and it hasn't paid a dividend since. I don't see any reason for it except that company is run by thieves. I tell you, six men get salaries of more than fifty thousand dollars a year, and what I want to know is how they can pay salaries like that and pass dividends for four years. By God, Clay, I'm going

to fight 'em until I find out !" He pounded his fist suddenly on the arm of his rocking chair.

"Now, Papa," Olivia said from the doorway, "don't talk about business when it's so hot."

"I'll never buy stock again, nor bonds," Amon said. "A good sound mortgage is the best investment next to cattle eating themselves fat as butter on the grass. — Ninety-eight thousand dollars I put into that copper stock !"

Hilda glanced at the old man with raised eyebrows, and listened, leaning against a pillar, when Melvin came to the piazza later to go over the accounts with Amon. The old man questioned every item, frowning over a new axe-handle, a coil of rope, commenting : "Couldn't you get along without that ?" — demanding an explanation for every purchase.

In the later afternoon, when Olivia had driven Amon back to Rutherford, Hilda went to the kitchen to wash the dishes and as she stood at the sink she saw Clay sitting on the woodpile smoking a cigarette. She called to him angrily, and when he came to the door she said : "You never help me with the dishes any more."

"Oh, I'm sorry." He took a flowered apron from a nail on the wall and tied it around his waist.

But her anger was not because of his inattention. She said quietly : "Clay, think of buying nearly a hundred thousand dollars' worth of stock and begrudging Melvin Coleman a few dollars for the cotton."

"Can't you forget about that cotton, Hilda ?"

"No, I can't. — And Clay, when are you going to come to an arrangement with the Senator ?"

"He said I'd be taken care of."

"And he tells Melvin that too, I guess."

"I'm his grandson, Hilda. He's not an ogre."

"You always thought he was."

"No I didn't." Clay smiled.

"You went to France for four years to get away from him."

"So that I could paint, yes."

"Or wasn't painting just an excuse to escape from him ?"

Clay wiped the dishes in silence and after a moment she said in a calmer tone : "Clay, you haven't touched your paints since you've been down here, have you ?"

"No."

"Aren't you going to ?"

"I haven't time."

"But you will have now that you've got the de-horning finished."

"There'll be other things to do." He turned away, taking off his apron.

"Clay, for heaven's sake, don't be so dispirited. You're just an automaton. — Haven't you any will of your own ?"

He hung the apron on the nail and came back to her. "Hilda, please don't urge me constantly to do things. It only makes me rebellious. Can't we be natural together as we were, without this tension ?" He put his arms around her. "In this damned heat you must take things more easily."

She clung to him and her eyes were moist against the collar of his blue cotton shirt ; her tense muscles relaxed. "If ranch life is going to make us cross and disagreeable it isn't worth it," he said.

"What else could we do ?"

"We're here now. We've got to stick it out, Hilda."

She looked up, and seeing the expression of his eyes, said softly : "All right, we'll have a truce. I won't be disagreeable. — But, Clay, it's your grandfather that makes me so."

That night as they sat on the piazza watching fireflies drift against the dark sky, Hilda sat with her knees drawn up to her chin, looking unblinking at the stars. She saw very clearly that Clay was slipping away from her, again under the influence of his grandfather, and his resentment of her criticism of the old man hurt her. If she became a docile, uncomplaining wife he would like it, and Amon would like her too, but she felt that to do so would be to lose her own identity. She would not go with Clay and Olivia into the dominant shadow the old man had cast over three generations. She felt that she could see his weaknesses, his vulnerability, better than they, but she knew that Clay must find it, and his own strength, for himself. If only she could help him

to do so ; if only he could share her perspective. But the work of the ranch blinded Clay. He must turn to Amon Hall for advice ; the old man was his oracle. His first resolve to learn for himself, to stand on his own feet, had been dissipated, and Hilda knew now that he would not oppose Amon in anything. Now he was lax and unobservant ; for days at a time he did not shave. . .

Now each night Hilda would watch Melvin come out of the log house and stare at the brilliant sky above, at the stars which shone down always unclouded on the dry earth. He would stand a long time with despairing eyes turned to the heavens, while the coyotes wailed mournfully from the timberline across the creek, the coyotes which each night ringed the ranch-house to sound their doleful concert in the still night. And three days later Melvin left off hoeing suckers from the corn at noon time and walked back among the brown stalks to the house. The lane now was inches deep in creamy dust and the grass was dry as chaff. There were deep cracks in the ground and the heat was reflected stiflingly from the crusted earth. The trees along the main road were filmed white with dust, and wherever the feet of man or animal had trod there was a matted path in the sapless grass. There was a path from the ranch-house to the house of logs, to the windmill, to the barn and the corral ; paths crossing and intersecting each other in the dusty Bermuda grass.

Melvin went into the shadow of the log house and threw his hat on a table. Through the window he saw Blossom bent over her washtub in the shade of the mulberry tree, by the wood pile. After a moment he went out again into the sun, bareheaded, and walked around past the great rock chimney toward her.

“Blossom,” he said. “We got no corn.”

“What’s that, Melvin ?” She turned toward him, perspiration dripping from her face, her arms buried up to the elbow in the suds of the washtub.

“I said we won’t make no corn crop. — Blossom, our corn’s burnt up, clean burnt up. There ain’t a tossle left in the whole field.”

“Oh now, Melvin, come a rain. . .

"A rain won't help none, Blossom," he said, sitting down on the chopping log. "It's too late now. And there ain't goin' to be a rain. I can see that."

"Melvin, don't talk that-a-way," Blossom said whiningly. "Now please you don't."

"But it's the truth, gal."

"Now let's wait and see, Melvin. Maybe there'll come a rain."

"A rain won't do no good, I tell you."

"But maybe it will, Melvin."

He looked at the dazzling sky and shook his head. "Now God damn it. Now God damn. Just a light shower a week ago might have saved it, Blossom. Just a few drops of rain. But look at that sky, burning like sheet metal. Now God damn it, I say."

"Melvin, you oughtn't to talk like that."

"That was the finest stand of corn in the county, Blossom. Everybody said it was. Why, Brother Williams said it was as good as any he ever saw — just come a rain, he said." Melvin's voice died away. But suddenly he jumped up from the chopping block. "It ain't right, Blossom. By God it ain't. I ain't goin' to stand fer it. By Jesus I ain't."

"Melvin, you go in the house and git your hat. You'll take a stroke bareheaded in the sun."

"Don't care if I do."

"Melvin, you hear me." Blossom turned toward him, soapsuds dripping from her brown arms. "You go in the shade of the house and set down, you hear. I'll git you a glass of buttermilk to drink. You hear, you go and set."

Melvin turned away and stumbled around the corner of the house and Blossom stood looking after him, her eyes wet and burning. She raised one hand to wipe her eyes and the stinging soapsuds blinded her.

Melvin walked on past the house, past the windmill and the garden, the dust rising suffocatingly from his boots. He went on to the corn field. The stalks were taller than his head, but the broad pointed leaves were dry and brown and lacerated. They

hung drearily to the ground, a great umber army of drooping banners in the burning heat. Melvin put out his hand and wrenched an ear of corn from a stalk, ripped back the dried shucks and looked at the hard dry ear, a cob without grain. He threw it on the ground and stepped upon it. He kicked the stalk and it broke in brittle fashion in the middle and hung over sapless in the heat. He seized a hoe which leaned against the fence and, cursing, swung it against the stalk, biting it off clean at the ground. The crisp leaves fell about his body. He swung the hoe again and again against the brittle stalks, grinding the dried ears of corn into the hard dirt with his heel.

From the house Hilda saw Melvin going crazily among the corn stalks, swinging the hoe ; she saw the bright metallic arc of the hoe-blade, flashing in the sun. She saw Blossom standing with her mouth open under the mulberry tree, staring toward the corn field. She heard Blossom call, shriekingly : "Melvin !" Then she ran out of the house, toward the mulberry tree.

"Blossom, what's the matter ?"

"It's Melvin, ma'am." She called again, in two long-drawn syllables : "Mel-vin !"

"I see him. What's the matter ?"

"His corn is burned up," Blossom said. "It's past saving. — Miz Hall, I'm afraid he'll take a sunstroke, out yonder without a hat. Look at him. I'm afeard he's took." Blossom began to sob, and now she trotted forward through the dry musty grass, soapsuds still on her arms, her sunbonnet sideways on her head. Hilda followed her along the lane past the garden to the corn field.

As they turned the corner by the fence Melvin was coming toward them, head down, hands clenched, a tense dynamic figure among the barren rows of stalks, framed by a solitary pure white cloud that was resting on a hill behind him. When he was twenty yards away he looked up and saw them waiting for him. He looked steadily at Blossom as he stumbled forward and suddenly, when he had nearly reached them, he grinned sheepishly, with his head on one side : "Now warn't that a damn fool thing to do, Blossom ? — I was clean mad, though."

"Melvin, now, you scared me." Blossom's voice trembled and he put his arms around her, with a self-conscious glance at Hilda, and she turned away and walked back toward the ranch-house. The creamy dust rose stifling from her feet ; the sun beat down upon her, and Hilda looked overhead at the clear hot sky. A fierce anger rose in her, a burning resentment at the days of unending heat, the dry still cloudless days of drouth.

After a while Melvin and Blossom walked back to the windmill. Melvin drank deep from the dipper and then went to the house for his hat. After he had gone off in the direction of the barn Blossom returned to her washboard under the mulberry tree and Hilda went to her.

"Now he was just like a boy that didn't know no better, wasn't he ?" Blossom said, smiling. "But I think he feels easier now he done it."

"It was a sensible thing to do," Hilda said, almost choked by her helpless sympathy for this gentle, tenacious farm couple. "He had to work off his anger some way."

"Yes, he did. He shore did. We set a heap of store by that corn, Miz Hall. It would of kept us easy through the winter, and Melvin aimed to buy a new car, too. — Of course I don't care about a new car, but Melvin wanted it so."

"Yes, I know," Hilda said, nodding, and the indignation in her needed some expression. She suffered from Blossom's helpless acceptance of her fate ; she wanted perversely to engulf her in the caldron of her emotion and she said : "It's too bad you didn't plant any cotton this year."

"Why, that would of been burned up too, I reckon."

"Senator Hall got money from the government for not planting cotton," Hilda said, stretching to pick a purple mulberry from the tree. "Did he pay any of it to you, Blossom ?"

"Us ? Why no, he didn't." Blossom turned wide brown eyes to Hilda. "It's his land, Miz Hall. I reckon it's his money, too."

"But Melvin worked the land share alike with him," Hilda said slowly. "I thought he might have paid Melvin something. They were partners."

Blossom was looking at her steadily, and Hilda bit the mulberry, then spat it to the ground.

"I don't know much about farming," Hilda said. "But that's how I thought it was done. I thought you shared the money from the government the same as you shared the crops."

Hilda went back to the house, now a little ashamed of her perversity, and startled at how completely she identified her anger with Amon Hall. She flung herself on the bed and lay staring with hot dry eyes at the barren slope of the hill framed by the window-sill and the yellowed leaves of the pecan tree in the yard.

xi

OLIVIA knelt in the attic of the old yellow house in Rutherford, beside a huge green trunk that was chipped and discolored and now a gray tone with the dust of years. Hilda sat in an old rattan chair smoking a cigarette, the blue smoke rising in a straight thin line to the rafters. It was the first time since she had moved to the ranch that Hilda had visited Rutherford. Clay had put her on the train at Briar Forks that morning and Olivia had met her at the station, a nervous, gasping Olivia, saying : "Hilda, he's done it. He's rented the house and we have to move out this week. — I feel terribly about having strangers in the house, but he's made up his mind about it."

When they reached the gabled house Olivia had taken Hilda to the attic and now she knelt by the old green trunk, saying : "This trunk belonged to my mother, Hilda. It's been here in the attic ever since I can remember, and even when I was a little girl it was mine to keep my things in." She raised the lid and moved aside a heap of musty silk. "Here's a picture of her, Hilda."

Hilda looked at the photograph showing in faded tones a blonde woman with a strong, pretty face, a long chin with a dimple.

"She knew how to handle Papa," Olivia said. "She was the only one who could." Olivia looked up at Hilda critically. "Yes, you remind me of her, dear, the shape of your face." She laughed. "A man doesn't know what he's about when he marries a pretty woman with a chin like yours and my mother's." Olivia

leaned against the trunk, after a moment held out another photograph to Hilda, a young man with sideburns, an intense, sensitive face.

"Not the Senator?" Hilda asked.

"No, that's Ross. — My beau, Hilda."

"Oh."

"It was about this time of year that he went away." Olivia sighed. "People in Rutherford say I never married because of him. Well, that's a sweet thought, but it's not strictly true." She got up with difficulty from her knees and lowered the lid of the trunk, then sat upon it. "We grew up together, Ross and I. His house was down the block yonder, and the bungalow we're moving into is one of those that stands on the very plot, Hilda. — Papa never liked Ross, and I believe he was satisfied when he didn't come back. I know he was."

Hilda sat watching the smoke of her cigarette, feeling that she should not ask questions, and after a moment Olivia stood up and took the frame of an old picture-hat, to which a few bands of silk and an artificial cherry still adhered, from a hook on a rafter. "I bought this hat that last spring, Hilda, and I had a pink dress with leg-of-mutton sleeves to go with it. It's in one of these trunks somewhere. I'm always saving things, Hilda. It's not because I'm sentimental, but I always feel that some day I may be able to do something with them. The frame of this hat is still in good shape, isn't it?" She laughed. "I suppose I get that from Papa." She closed the trunk and sat upon it, with the framework of wire and silk in her lap. Looking across at Hilda with her bright blue eyes shadowed in the gloomy attic, she said: "Ross and I went for a ride in his bananawood buggy and he had a new horse, a stallion, Hilda, that was very wild. It was driven down across country from Kentucky and he bought it in Fort Worth. There weren't any automobiles then and we went for a drive in the country, away out along the Brazos. Ross said he could pass anything on the road with that rig and I guess he could, around here anyway. — But there was a mare in a pasture. . ." Olivia tittered, and raised her handkerchief to her lips.

"Oh, it was shameful, Hilda. I'm ashamed to tell it to you, I really am."

"Oh, Olivia, go on."

"Well, of course the stallion didn't want to pass by that mare and Ross had to take the whip to it — a long blacksnake whip that he could crack like a thunder clap, Hilda. Well, he hit the stallion a lick with it and the whip wrapped right around him — well, you know, you've *seen* stallions — and the poor thing kicked that buggy to bits. I was thrown out in the road." Olivia pressed the handkerchief to her lips and Hilda laughed. "Oh, I never saw Ross so angry. That beautiful bananewood buggy, it was ruined, Hilda, and the stallion ran away and there we were miles from anywhere. And then it rained." Olivia held the frame of the hat at arms-length. "I was soaked and the hat was ruined and I had on satin slippers and had to walk in the mud. We were engaged and we didn't care very much about appearances and Ross said we might as well find shelter so we went down along the river bottoms and he built a lean-to and lit a fire to dry us and after a while I went to sleep. When I woke up it was black midnight. It had quit raining, but you couldn't see three feet ahead of you in the river bottoms. I said I didn't feel like stumbling home in the dark and Ross said he didn't, so we stayed there. . ." Olivia hung the hat again on the hook and returned to the green trunk. "In the morning we got a ride on a hay wagon part of the way and it was high noon when we got to town. Papa had been looking for us everywhere and everybody in town knew about it. I thought he was going to cane Ross, I really did. He said we had to get married right away and Ross said nothing would please him more and that only made Papa storm. Ross had to go away on business and we planned to have the wedding as soon as he came back. But he didn't come, Hilda. — You know, I wish I smoked cigarettes, too, they seem to soothe you so."

"Why don't you try one?"

"Oh, no thank you. Not in the same house with Papa. I might get the habit, and he'd find out."

"Would that make much difference now?"

"Hilda, you haven't let him catch you smoking, have you?"

"No."

"Well, don't. Please don't."

"I won't, Olivia."

"Ross smoked cigarettes, too, and Papa didn't approve of that. He didn't approve of anything about Ross. Cigars he never minded, but he was always against cigarettes — said they were a nasty French habit. Papa hated Frenchmen. You see, he had a Frenchman for a rival when he courted Mother, and he always thought there was something a little weak-headed about her because she ever liked that Frenchman at all." Olivia looked steadily at Hilda. "It was so strange of Papa. Maybe he thinks no woman has any sense. But after that, after Ross, that is, whenever I had a beau Papa would come sit on the porch with us and he'd never leave us alone. After a while they just wouldn't come any more, Hilda. They didn't want to call on a girl when her father would sit there beside them, sometimes not opening his mouth all evening."

"You mean you weren't allowed to go out alone with men?"

"People didn't usually go about without chaperones then, Hilda, not nice girls anyhow, but at least when a man called at your home you were allowed to see him without your father sitting there like a watchdog. Other girls were, anyhow." Olivia sighed. "But I might as well tell you the rest of it, Hilda. Sitting here in the attic, seeing the picture of him and that old hat makes me want to talk about it, I suppose. It sticks in my mind again. — For a long time I thought I'd never forget it even for a little. — It was only a little item in the paper at first. It was early in September and hot, I remember. There was an item that a hurricane from the West Indies was shifting toward the Texas coast, but nobody paid much attention to it. About that time a norther began to blow and here in Rutherford we were thinking of the norther and how cool it became all of a sudden. But there in Galveston the barometer began to drop about noon. It was the eighth of September, I remember. I'll never forget the date. I've imagined it, Hilda, almost as if I'd been through

it, and I read every line in the paper. I never saw his name on the list and for years after that I thought he might come back. I really did. I've imagined him escaping in all sorts of ways. John Lord from Rutherford was in the flood and he escaped. He was there when the tidal wave swept over the city. He saw floating timbers hurled like battering rams against houses and crush them in. He was hit by a scantling and knocked unconscious but somehow he came to and wasn't drowned. Somebody in a window had fished him out as he floated by. Slates from the roofs were whisked over the water like boys skipping flat stones and people were struck and injured by them. Somehow John got a flat-bottomed boat and it was so crowded with people it nearly sunk. They poled through the water and he said there were bodies rolling like logs in it, and horses and dogs swollen like balloons. When the storm was over it was hot as July, sultry and oppressive, and smoke from burning houses and funeral pyres was over the city like wood smoke in the forest. John said he drank a quart of whisky and never even felt it. He said he didn't know whether he was alive or dead all that time. He said people were cutting fingers and ears off the swollen bodies to get jewelry and there were soldiers who shot them. There wasn't any light or water and a thousand bodies that were towed out to sea and buried were washed in again by the tide. He said it was a nightmare he'd never forget. — But he didn't see Ross, Hilda. Nobody ever saw him. — I wanted to go to Galveston and look but Papa wouldn't let me. I came up here to the attic and sat right here by this old green trunk. I wanted to run away then and go to Galveston. Things like that are supposed to make people dazed, or sick, but I wasn't. I was nervous and jumpy for a long time, that's all, and Papa sent me up to Colorado Springs until the snow, and then north to New York that winter. It was the first time I was ever there, and the only time. And after I came home I never heard Papa mention Ross again, not once."

Olivia got abruptly to her feet. "Goodness, Hilda, we came up here to get some suitcases and I haven't even looked." She slipped away shadow-like among the beams and Hilda heard her pushing aside a box, then she returned with flushed face, carrying

two dusty suitcases. Hilda wiped them off with a rag and they took them down the narrow flight of stairs to Olivia's room.

"I really don't know what to take away," Olivia said. "Hilda, I've always lived here. All my things have always been here. I don't know what to take away."

"It won't be for long, will it?"

"Papa's rented the house by the month, from month to month. It seems a shame not to be able to go up into the attic when I want to. There are so many things I like to take out and look at. It's sentimental of me, but I like to do it, Hilda. I suppose I'm getting old."

"Why, Olivia, you're a young woman. There's nothing old about you," Hilda said. "I've always thought of you as my age," she said, meaning it.

"I'm old enough to be a grandmother," Olivia said slyly. "And maybe I will be soon. That is, Clay has always seemed like a son to me, and if you and he should have a child, well — I'd be a grandmother."

"I'll spare you that," Hilda said.

"Now don't say that, Hilda. Don't you want a child?"

"No, I don't," Hilda said flatly. She lit another cigarette and sat on the edge of the bed as Olivia opened out the suitcases on the ledge at the bow-window.

"You'll change your mind," Olivia said. "Women always do. — Now, Hilda, if you'll pass me those clothes off the hanger it will help me."

Olivia and Hilda took the suitcases and various boxes filled with toilet articles and silver and bric-a-brac that was personal and necessary to Olivia to the bungalow in the car. When they went downstairs they found Clemmy carrying Amon's law books out to the lawn, where he stacked them in a wheelbarrow.

"Papa insisted in taking all his books," Olivia said. "I don't know why. He never opens them. — But I suppose it's the same reason that makes me take along that old gold clock that doesn't run."

Ina helped them put the luggage in the car. She was hot and complaining, saying: "Miss Olivia, I declare, what's got into de

Sen'tor to move out of dis house. Who is dese people goin' to move into it?"

"It will only be for a few months, Ina. At least I hope so. And you are to go on living in the servants' house."

"I don't want no other nigger in my kitchen, Miss Olivia," Ina said. "'At's what I don't like."

Driving to the bungalow they passed Clemmy, bent over the wheelbarrow, his bare black forehead glistening in the sunlight. The bungalow was one of five in a row, all alike in design, with long sweeping roofs like the wings of an airplane. Downstairs there were three rooms and a kitchen ; upstairs three small bedrooms. The house smelled of varnish and paint and looked bare with the rugs not yet laid.

"Oh, I suppose we can be comfortable here," Olivia said. "But it's a little like camping out, isn't it ? And I'm going to miss the front lawn and the privacy of the hedge."

Olivia started to unpack and arrange her things in her bedroom, but she had no interest in it, and before noon she and Hilda walked back in the breathless air, under the scarred leaves of sycamore trees, to the gabled house. The lawn was burned brown and the ivy was shrivelled above the piazza ; sunlight broke through it upon them as they sat in rocking chairs on the porch.

"Papa walked to town this morning," Olivia said. "I told him I'd drive him down, but he insisted on walking. For a man eighty-four years old he has amazing energy, Hilda. More than I have. He won't admit even to himself that his body's any older than it ever was. — I don't think he ever had a lazy moment in his life, when he could just relax and lie easy. Of course he takes a nap every day, but the way he does it is to lie down and just force himself to sleep because it's the time for his nap and by heavens he's going to nap." Olivia had a straw fan that she wielded briskly from the heel of her palm, stirring the fine white hair at her forehead. "You know, about three months ago he came home one day and told me that he was the oldest Hall on record, that no member of his family had lived longer than he. He had it looked up and he'd just passed the record and he was

so proud he chuckled over it all day. You'd think he'd lived his life just to be the oldest Hall, the way he acted. But his good humor didn't last long. He was nervous and fidgety the very next day. — Papa's been unusually irritable all the past year, Hilda. You're seeing him at his worst, you really are. And he *is* a hard man to get used to. I don't suppose there's anybody like him in your family."

"No, there isn't," Hilda said crisply, and Olivia laughed. "But I haven't much family, Olivia," Hilda said. "Only my father and two sisters."

"You don't talk much about your folks, Hilda," Olivia said. In the back of her mind was the thought that it was somehow sordid not to be fond of one's family, no matter what the circumstances. "Don't you like it at home?"

"Yes, I miss it," Hilda said.

"Oh. — Well, I didn't know. You talk so little about home."

"Texas is my home now. — I was born in the southern part of New Hampshire, Olivia, in a village that was laid out in 1760 and hasn't changed much since. It's in a valley, on a sort of plateau at the end of the valley. Father has a garage, and a farm they don't plant anything on any more. He never has much money, just about enough to get along, but you don't need money up there. You never have to think much about it. — This time of year it's bright and cool." Hilda drew her lungs full of the warm air. "Thinking of it doesn't seem real in this heat. There's a lake around every turn in the road and you see the birch trees standing white against the forest. — Oh, I miss it, Olivia."

"I can see you do. Texas is a hard rugged country, Hilda. In winter the northerers seem to separate your flesh from your bones and in the summer you've got to be part horse to live in it. Afoot you have to walk through Spanish needles and poison oak and stinging nettle and cockle-burrs and cactus."

"It's an extrovert country," Hilda said. "Everyone is so objective. Sometimes I would like to go off in the woods and hide for a day, if only there were any woods to hide in."

"Texas is for men and Amazons," Olivia said, nodding her head. Her fan was arrested and the rocking of her chair ceased.

"Here comes Papa now, walking along in the heat as if it were a spring day. The doctor told him not to do it, too."

Amon wore a seersucker suit that clung to his spare limbs, a panama hat pulled down low on his forehead. He did not look up as he came along the walk, did not raise his eyes until he had climbed the steps to the piazza, then he took off his hat and, seeing Hilda, said : "Well, young lady, how's everything at the ranch ?"

"All right," Hilda said.

"Clay didn't come away too, did he ?" Amon asked in a sharper tone.

"No."

"I don't want him to go off and leave the ranch. Something might go wrong." Amon sat down in a rocking chair on the other side of Olivia and fanned his face with his hat. "Well, I took a load off my mind today, Olivia. I feel better. Yes, I do."

"What was that, Papa ?"

"Hilda." He peered around Olivia at her. "Has there been any trouble with those steers that were de-horned ?"

"No."

"Or the others ? Those that were . . ."

"No, not that I know of." Hilda turned her chair toward him. "But Melvin's corn is ruined. The sun has burned it up."

"I was afraid of that. Yes, last time I was out there I could see there wasn't much hope for it. How about the garden ?"

"We sprinkle it every day, but it's beginning to fail."

"Yes. — Well, it can't be helped. It looks like we're in for a long drouth. — Olivia." He turned his neck stiffly. "We'd better take what we can out of the garden next time we're out there. Reckon it will be our last chance."

"Melvin was terribly upset about the corn," Hilda said. "He worked so hard on it. All day long he was out there with his hoe in the sun . . ."

"That's the way farm work is done, young lady," Amon said with a chuckle. "But he's supposed to help with the ranch work, too. That corn shouldn't take up all of his time. He knows that."

"It won't take any more of his time now," Hilda said dryly.

"No, that's true. Yes, it's too bad about that corn."

"There's nothing else for Melvin to put his hope in now that the corn is gone," Hilda said. "He's sorry now he didn't plant cotton this year."

"Well, there's not much chance of making a cotton crop hereabouts anyway," Amon said. "It was a good thing we didn't plant cotton, and it will do that land good to lie fallow a year."

"Of course you got paid not to plant cotton," Hilda said.

Amon smiled. "That's one time I got ahead of the government."

"But that doesn't help Melvin any." Hilda felt that Olivia was looking at her, but she did not turn her head. "He was wondering if any of the money from the cotton was due him."

"Due him?" Amon said. "Due *him*!"

"Yes," Hilda said, meeting his eyes. Her strong chin stood out in outline to Olivia, who sat silent with her fingers clenched on the handle of her fan. "Weren't you partners in farming the land?"

"We were not," Amon said explosively. "Whatever put that idea into your head? Melvin is my hired man." His hands were gripped on the arms of his chair and his face was pink; his nose was an angry red.

"Now, Papa," Olivia said. "It's so hot."

"What did Melvin say to you?" Amon asked fiercely.

"It wasn't Melvin," Hilda said in a quiet tone. "But it seemed to me that he was entitled to some of the money, especially now that he needs it so much. — It's not a question of his legal right. He needs help, and there's no one for him to turn to but you." She gave him a sidelong glance. "You stand over him like a sort of god and he's absolutely dependent on you. If you don't help him no one will and I thought you'd want to do it."

"Why, I pay him ten dollars a month," Amon said in a milder voice.

"But do you think that's enough? He depended on the corn to carry him through the winter."

"It's a shame he has to eat bread and cream gravy all through

the winter, and with that young baby," Olivia said bravely, looking straight ahead of her.

"Other people get along on less," Amon said, with a keen glance at the two women. "And all the work ain't left to Melvin. Clay's out there now." He stood up. "You women," he said. "You women don't seem to know that these are hard times. Why, money is scarce, I tell you. Today I had to give that furniture factory up."

"You gave it up, Papa?" Olivia looked up, startled.

"Yes. That factory belonged to your grandfather, Olivia. He started it back in the days when everybody made their own furniture here in Texas. We've kept it running ever since, through good times and bad. It never made much money, but we always kept it running, and in these past few years it's been in the red. Well, Olivia, today I put that factory into bankruptcy."

"Bankruptcy, Papa?" Olivia said in her stifled, frightened voice.

"Yes, under that new bankruptcy law, section 77-B. Maybe they'll reorganize it and keep it running, I don't know. But it's out of my hands now. I won't have to worry about paying men high wages for a forty hour working week any more." He stared at Hilda. "I suppose you're in favor of that, young lady."

Hilda stared ahead with her lips pressed together, and after a pause Amon grunted. "Well, thank God, it's out of my hands now, and it takes a load off my mind, I can tell you." He looked sharply at Hilda and walked abruptly into the house, into his study, and they heard the door slam.

"Hilda, you scared me," Olivia said. "Why in the world did you want to anger Papa that way?"

"Somebody had to do it, Olivia. Clay wouldn't, and Melvin doesn't dare, so I did."

"It won't do any good, dear."

"Maybe not, but I had to say something about it."

That evening, after Hilda had returned to the ranch and Olivia and Amon were alone in the study he peered at her keenly several times as he sat by the radio, bent over, with his hands

clasped between his knees. Olivia was uncomfortable with him watching her, and unhappy in the room from which so many familiar objects now had been moved, thinking of strangers sitting there in the long summer twilight. And at last Amon cleared his throat and, staring at her, said stridently : "Olivia, that girl's a trouble-maker."

xii

SOMETIMES there were clouds white as marshmallows heaped one upon another in the western sky, and the sun set through them in an explosion of color that tinted all the heavens, but there was no rain. Sometimes the sun flew a hopeful banner at daybreak as it shone through banked clouds, but within a few minutes the sky would again be a dazzling ice-blue color and the sun would burn down on the dry brown earth. The corn stalks stood like thin poles thrust into the ground, crumbling little by little into dust. The grass in the ranch yard became brown strings laid upon the ground, crushed under foot, and the pasture grass lost color to the roots, was dry as hay. No longer were there any wild flowers.

Very soon Briar Creek had dried into stagnant pools, and the water was low in the concrete tanks. Amon came frequently to the ranch and with Clay he rode one day along the course of the creek. The hoofs of their horses rang on gravel and flat soapy rock or fell softly in banks of sand that before had been under water. Occasionally they came to small pools, muddied by the hoofs of cattle, in which fish leaped as they watched.

They rode across a bench of land to the main tank, a mile from the creek, and found steers standing in it. When Clay shouted they scrambled clumsily over the rough concrete sides and trotted away. The sides of the tank were lined with dried moss and there was only a foot of water in the tank, almost out of reach of the cattle. Amon looked overhead at the windmill. It was a still day, as so many successive days had been, hot and very still, and the fans were not turning ; there was not even a fugitive creak above. Amon dismounted and stumbled over the dried mud to the edge

of the tank and stood with his hands on his hips looking at the soupy water.

"Clay, you and Melvin had better rig up a guard to keep those animals out of the tank," he said. "And we'll have to do something to get more water. I tell you it's aggravating. Why don't the wind blow enough to turn that windmill, at least? Is there anything wrong with it, Clay? Is anything fouled up there?"

"No, Senator. There simply isn't any wind."

"Damn it, Clay, I suppose we'll have to get a pump. I hate to do it, but those animals need water. I'll have to get a gasoline engine, Clay. I'll shop around for one in Rutherford. Do you reckon you can install it?"

"Sure."

"All right, that's what I'll do. I'll have to. I'll attend to it right away, Clay."

They rode away; on his trips to the ranch Amon was determined that not a single steer should escape his vigilance and he rode tirelessly from group to group, on the open prairie, on the dry slopes, along the creek bottoms where the foliage was nearly burned away from the trees.

"It looks like this might be another drouth like that in 1886," Amon said. "That was worse than in 1917, Clay — I guess you remember that one. Why, back in '86 we thought the whole country would starve to death. There wasn't a crop to harvest and the cattle business didn't recover for years; there had been a boom in beef prices up until then and millions of dollars from all over the world had been poured into investments in Texas cattle ranches. But those big companies folded up overnight. I remember here in Paladora County we had a meeting and every man with a stick and a stone to his name pledged ten per cent of the value of his real estate to make up a cash bonus to pay the railroad to build that branch line out past Briar Forks. That gave work to the farmers and tided them over to the next year and we thought we'd get a benefit from the new line, but it never paid us, nor the railroad either." He pushed his hat farther back on his head and shifted sideways in his saddle, looking at Clay. "I

tell you, this country has a scourge on it. With just a normal rainfall to depend on year after year you wouldn't know Texas. It would be a regular paradise if there was just rain to count on. — I remember when the Federal government tried to make rain down here, Clay. They sent down a man with a balloon and a few sticks of dynamite and he tried to blow rain out of the sky. It didn't work." Amon smiled, then straightened in his saddle with a frown. "Look at that steer, Clay, that brindle one. Ain't that a speck of fresh blood on his head?"

Clay drove his horse forward, then called back : "I'm afraid so."

"Then it's a screw worm, sure as can be. Is there any swelling, Clay?"

"Some."

"I told you to keep an eye on those steers, Clay. Now you'll have to get some arsenic and treat that animal. And you'll have to keep a sharp watch on the others, too. I told you that, Clay."

"I've ridden the pastures regularly, Senator," Clay said. "I've inspected the fences and the cattle every day." He frowned. Again he was on the defensive with his grandfather, and in sudden irritation he gripped the pommel of his saddle. "I've been as careful as I know how. I've looked at every one of those damned steers every day." The sun burned down on his head and perspiration started from his forehead, where the hatband pressed him tightly, and trickled down his hot face. "I put plenty of pine tar on the wounds. What else could I do?"

"Now I wasn't criticizing you, boy," Amon said, glancing across at Clay with a half-smile. "I know you lack experience and I don't want to be hard with you. — For a young man who's been idling away his time in France you've done all right. Yes, you've done better than I expected. Of course I didn't expect your wife to take to ranch work. She's a New England girl. She's not used to this kind of life. — Clay, is there any blood on that other young steer?"

"No," Clay said after a brief glance at the calf.

"Women don't have much conception of what hard times are," Amon said. "Why, this is fixing to be the worst drouth in history. The papers are saying that. We've got a thousand

things to worry about — the water supply, the pasturage. — Clay, I had to put the furniture factory into bankruptcy and now I've got to buy a gasoline pump to supply water to that herd, and that will draw cattle over to the main tank and away from the creek and they'll overgraze this part of the ranch and they'll begin to lose weight. Cattle don't go to water more than once in every two or three days ordinarily, but in this dry weather they'll have to go every day and they'll graze on this slope here. I tell you, there are a thousand things to occupy her mind, but what she's most worried about is Melvin Coleman."

Clay looked quickly at his grandfather, and met the old man's sharp bright eyes. "I don't know if she wants to make trouble. I don't know what she's thinking of," Amon said. "Telling me I ought to pay Melvin money because I decided not to plant cotton this year."

Clay rode along in silence and Amon said : "Women give way to sentimentality, Clay. They always want to give something to somebody who ain't entitled to it, to somebody who ain't worked for it. The way of life that has gone on since the Christian world began they want to meddle with and arrange to suit themselves. — Why I remember your mother, Clay, never could pass a stray dog on the road but she had to pick it up and take it home. She'd give it a bath and brush it up, maybe put a ribbon around its neck, and then try to find a home for it." Amon had talked away his own doubts, stimulated by Clay's silence, and now he chuckled, saying : "But it's a good thing you married, Clay. You seem to be a more serious boy now."

When Clay and Amon had left the ranch-house that morning, Hilda had watched them go, had watched Clay hold the old bay while Amon pulled his stiff leg into the stirrup. Olivia had complained of a headache and was lying on a cot on the piazza, gasping in the heat. After the dishes were washed, after the beds were made and the floors swept, after the routine of house work had been completed, the heat closed in breathlessly, radiating from the roof and the crusted earth, rising in steaming waves from the prairie. The walls seemed lined with woolen, and Hilda would sink into a chair with a fan then and stir a faint warm

breeze against her cheek. She sat that morning in the dining room, leaving Olivia to sleep on the piazza, and after a time she noticed a newspaper on the table in a ray of sunlight. It was a copy of the *Rutherford Post* and when she bent over to pick it up she saw that it was folded in emphatic creases to the editorial page, where one column had been heavily marked with black crosses in pencil. And as she read the type she knew that it had been left there for her to see. *These are times that call upon the fortitude that has carved for Texas an unique niche in history. We read of the courage and perseverance of the pioneers who endured almost legendary hardships to carve the state of Texas out of the wilderness, and we are apt to overlook the fact that this very day, although with less glamour, perhaps, and less of the romantic accompaniment of the old days, Texans are meeting a supreme crisis as bravely as their forbears. To add to the disaster of one of the greatest depressions in history the devastating effects of a severe drouth would seem more than human flesh could bear. But Texans came through the depression with flying colors, and the same indomitable courage which sustained those beleaguered heroes in the Alamo will surely manifest itself again. It was not Texas which set up the cry for a forty hour week, for minimum wages. Here in Texas a man never expected more than a fair day's pay for an honest day's work. And you will not find Texas farmers begging for relief as long as there is a cloud of hope on the horizon. If they can work out their own salvation you can depend on them to do it, if it is humanly possible. Picture a courageous Texas farmer, who knows that the world has to offer him only what he makes for himself, who knows that work keeps the devil away, that the joy of life is the joy of labor . . .*

Hilda threw the newspaper on the floor. She jumped to her feet and kicked it viciously, with a sudden explosive curse that awakened Olivia. Hilda heard the thin voice calling to her : "Hilda, what happened ?" She went to the piazza, tense and furious, bursting out : "Did the Senator bring that newspaper here this morning for my benefit ?"

"Oh, you mean that marked editorial ?"

"Yes."

"I suppose he did, Hilda. He read it aloud to me at breakfast." Olivia smiled. "That's his way, Hilda, don't mind it. Sometimes Papa won't come out in the open and discuss things with you, but he'll let you know what he thinks in some sullen, indirect way. Like that — or like when he used to come sit on the porch with me when a beau called. That's typical of him, Hilda."

"Sometimes I think I can't stand it any longer," Hilda said, leaning against a pillar. "Olivia, this is no way to live."

"It's the heat that affects you so. Try to forget about it."

"It's not the heat. I could endure that, if there were only anything to make it worth while. — But I can't stand it, Olivia."

"Hilda, I learned a long time ago not to pay much attention to Papa, not to let him affect me."

"I don't mean the Senator, entirely," Hilda said. "Although he's basically the reason for it. It's Clay. — I looked forward to our life together. I thought we could enjoy it together and have the same interests. I thought living together would be fun, but it's not. Of course the drouth has something to do with it, and his concern about the cattle. But some days we'll go all day and hardly speak to each other. Sometimes he thinks I nag him, and God knows, Olivia, I don't want to be a nagging wife. — At night he comes home and buries his nose in one of those agricultural bulletins about cattle ranching, and really I think he does it to avoid me. — I think he blames me a little for his not painting. He seems to personify his disappointments in me, Olivia. I think he feels that without me he never would have come to Texas and he'd still be painting — somewhere, and that's what he wants to do. Now he won't even touch his paints."

"I suppose there's something of Papa in Clay," Olivia said. "I'm afraid so."

"And if I criticize the Senator he only stares at me, with a patient look," Hilda said. "He agrees with me, but he doesn't like to hear *me* criticize him. I don't understand it. I always thought we could be entirely open and free between ourselves. That's the way we began."

"Clay is a little afraid of Papa, Hilda," Olivia said. "Remember that."

"I know. I can see it. And if I'd known his grandfather would get power over him again I never would have let him come back to Texas. I wouldn't have urged him to do it."

"Not power, exactly," Olivia said, in a tone of defense.

"But it is power, Olivia. I can understand now why Clay's father kept his automobile hidden. I can see why Clay ran away to France. — Olivia, I think he ought to go away again."

"He can't now, with the ranch work to be done."

"No, but later. In the winter — if it's not too late."

"I never wanted Clay to come home again until he was a man, until he was mature," Olivia said. "He still hasn't found himself. Hilda, I brought Clay to go away before, to France. He had some money that his grandmother left him and I told him to take it and go away, as soon as he was of age. — I knew as long as he had some money he would be all right, and when I'm gone, Hilda, well, I've made my will in Clay's favor."

Hilda sat down on the edge of the cot and pressed Olivia's hand. "You've done everything you could for Clay, Olivia."

"I only wanted him to have the freedom that I didn't, Hilda, and I don't want him to lose it now. Be patient with him, dear."

"I try to be, Olivia — and I'm at fault, too. I suppose I'm too nervous. I irritate him, and I go ahead and do the things he doesn't want me to. But I do it to force him to act, Olivia. I want him to assert himself more with the Senator. It's just a mental block that prevents him. — Why, I've seen his whole personality change since we've been down here. Maybe I imagine more than is there. Maybe I'm morbid about it. But he *has* changed."

"I think he has," Olivia said, sighing. She closed her eyes and Hilda with concern asked : "How do you feel, Olivia?"

"I have a severe neuralgia. Perhaps I've caught a germ of some sort."

"You should be home in bed."

"Papa was set on coming to the ranch today. I didn't want

to disappoint him. He can't drive the car any longer, you know."

"Yes — but you shouldn't be out in this heat, Olivia."

"I don't mind it. Really I don't. I think I'll try to get a little sleep, though."

Hilda went and sat under the mulberry tree, by the wood pile, and held Louise in her arms while Blossom churned butter. Blossom, as her round brown arms moved up and down with the dasher, said in her nasal voice above the sloshing sound of the milk : "You can take Miss Olivia a fresh glass of buttermilk when I git done churning. That ought to freshen her up. And I'll have some ready fer the Senator when he gits back from the pasture. He always likes a glass after his ride. — But there ain't much today, Miz Hall. The forage is so bad the cows don't give milk like they ought. I told Melvin he ought to feed 'em some of that Johnson grass hay in the barn. Reckon the Senator would mind ?"

"I'll ask him," Hilda promised, and later when Clay and Amon returned along the lane she waited for them on the back porch.

"Olivia's asleep," she told the old man. "She has a bad headache, and she looks very pale. She ought to be in bed."

"Is that so ?" Amon said. "I thought a little country air would do her good." He saw the pitcher of buttermilk on the table and poured himself a glass, which he carried to the piazza. Clay stood just inside the door. He took off his hat and struck it against his legs, whisking away Spanish needles that adhered to his trousers, and he bent over to dislodge a cockle-burr. Hilda sat down by the table, looking at him, waiting for him to speak. At last she said : "Do the cattle look all right ?"

"Yes. — We're going to get a gasoline engine to pump water. One of the steers we de-horned has screw worm."

"Is that serious ?"

"I don't think so." He straightened and looked at her, at last meeting her eyes. "I didn't know you spoke to the Senator about that cotton money."

"Yes." Hilda bit her lip. "I didn't mean to, Clay. We

were talking about the cotton, that's all." She said tensely : "What did he say ?"

"He just mentioned it casually." Clay sat down opposite her, the table between them. "Hilda, I wish you hadn't done it."

"But you wouldn't do it, Clay. What difference does it make ? Maybe it will help."

"It's hard enough as it is. — Hilda, I wish you wouldn't give him any grounds to criticize you, or dislike you."

"I'm not going to sit by like a mouse and tremble when he comes into the room."

"But we're dependent on him now. Don't you see that ? Try not to be disagreeable, Hilda."

"Disagreeable ?" She stared at him. "But, Clay . . ." Tears made her eyes hot, and she moved her head angrily, her yellow hair ruffling on her shoulders. "Damn it, you're the disagreeable one. You're sulky and unpleasant and critical of everything I do. — Clay, what's the matter with us ? What tight, vicious, trivial lives we're leading — fighting over a crop of cotton that was never planted. — Aren't we friends any more ?"

"Of course we are. Now, darling, I'm not being critical. It's only that . . ."

"Yes, it's only — oh Jesus, Jesus !" Hilda ran past him suddenly, through the doorway and hatless into the yard, slamming the screen door behind her. She walked across the wide space of bare burned earth to the barn and left Clay standing on the porch, looking after her. He did not follow her, and inside the barn she burst into tears. She sat on a bale of hay and sobbed convulsively, holding a handkerchief to her mouth, and a setting hen set up a busy, hysterical cackle in the hay nearby. A rooster walked by her with short, jerky steps, flapped his wings, and went out into the sun, and then it was still again and the musty dry smell of the hay stung her nostrils.

A half an hour later Hilda was still sitting motionless on the bale of hay, but dry-eyed now and with an absorbed intense stare that startled Blossom when she came to the barn with a basket over her arm to gather eggs. She hesitated at the barn door, then walked forward a few steps, looking at Hilda. For a mo-

ment she did not speak, then she said in a low, tender voice : "I'm shore sorry to see you unhappy, Miz Hall. Is this your first quarrel, now ?"

"Quarrel ?" Hilda said. "No — if only we did quarrel ! — Shall I help you look for eggs, Blossom ?"

When she returned to the house Clay was on the piazza with Olivia and Amon. He looked up when she came to the door. She waited a moment, wanting him to come to her, to come inside the house and say that he was sorry it had happened, to put his arms around her. But he sat on the edge of the piazza, looking at her, and after a moment she opened the door defiantly and went to sit beside Amon.

"Blossom says the cows aren't giving much milk," she said abruptly. "They don't get enough to eat. Shouldn't they have supplemental feeding — some of that hay in the barn, Senator ?"

"There's enough milk, ain't there ?"

Clay glanced up and Hilda met his eyes for only an instant, then turned her head aside. Then Clay said slowly : "Well, you don't want them to go dry, Senator."

"No, that's true. Yes, I guess they'd better have some hay, Clay. Tell Melvin to give them some of that Johnson grass hay — but no more than he has to."

"All right," Clay said.

Hilda knew that his supporting her had been a gesture of reconciliation, but it was not enough. She wanted a positive assertion, a masculine directness, not a vague and sulkily given loyalty. She avoided him the rest of the day and when the sun-light slanted low and Amon prepared to return to Rutherford she said to him : "While Olivia's ill I don't think she ought to go out in this heat, Senator. Clay could drive you into town and bring the car back here and go to fetch you the next time you come out."

"I think that's a very good plan, Hilda," Olivia said gratefully. "I do think I need a rest."

"Well, all right," Amon said. "Clay, get your hat and let's get started."

Hilda followed Clay into the house and said with a half-

smile: "I suppose you'd better have dinner in town, Clay. You'll be late getting back."

"Yes, all right."

When they had gone Hilda breathed a deep sigh and dropped into a rocking chair on the piazza. It was nearly dusk and there was relief from the heat; night seemed to settle with a long cool sigh over the sun-tortured land. From the distance came the whistle of quail, the shrill cry of a kildee along the creek. Smoke was trailing from the rock chimney of the old house in a thin blue haze along the ground toward the creek, and it was so quiet that she heard the lowing of cattle far away in the pasture. She saw a series of faint red objects as the herd went Indian file toward the water tank. In the corrals the milch cows were eating Johnson grass hay and as she heard the clear, sporadic rattle of the bell on the lead cow Hilda thought how pleasant it would be to be as insensitive as a cow which could spend its days oblivious of the ringing of a bell which marked its every movement.

Hilda went to the kitchen and breathed a deep sigh as she saw the fireless stove, relieved for the first time since she had come to the ranch of the burden of cooking dinner. There was a head of rather brown lettuce, some small, hard tomatoes, and buttermilk. She prepared a salad and supped on the back porch alone, and later it took only a moment to wash the dishes and she went to the piazza thinking that she had let the duties of cooking and housework too much oppress her, that she had become a farm wife. Clay did not always help her with the dishes; sometimes she had to urge him to do so. Gradually her place as cook and housewife had been taken for granted by him. She had worked hard; she had puzzled over the cook book to learn new recipes, but there had been small praise. It was crushing to realize how their life together had become routine, how the heat and the tension had made them almost strangers to each other.

The sun set in a blaze of color, and after it had gone from sight beyond a low ridge the sky was an infinite cerulean blue in which mustard yellow clouds floated in long streaks that stretched all across the heavens. Hilda watched it grow dark, and as she listened to the deep steam whistles of bullfrogs in the creek she

waited for the calling of the whip-poor-wills which began each night precisely at nine o'clock.

Soon after dark Hilda went to bed. When Clay returned she was awakened by the noise of a motor and again as he came into the house and lit a lamp. But when he entered the bedroom she did not turn her head. He held up the lamp and looked at her still form on the bed, at her yellow hair now nested tightly in curlers, moulding the shape of her head. As he undressed he threw his shoes away from him in a sudden temper, and they clattered on the floor.

XIII

THE next morning Hilda had Clay's breakfast prepared before he was awake. She slipped out of bed early in the morning and as she unfastened the curlers and let down her hair she listened to his deep breathing and thought that a month ago she would have awakened him with a kiss. Now she waited for advances to come from him and she was figuratively in retreat, avoiding him. She left the house after breakfast and walked along by the creek. When she first came to Texas the water had flowed swiftly among willows, among tall pecan trees and sycamores and live-oaks from the branches of which the swinging vines of mustang grape formed vagrant arbors and soft areas of deep shade. But now the ground beside the creek was bare of grass and there was no place entirely sheltered from the constant sun. The creek had dried in stagnant pools and flies hovered droningly over them, while dragonflies that seemed weary and shrunken by the heat poised in a breathless despair as still as the air. The creek bed was a highway between shelving banks of eroded land and rock flaky as dried putty, a highway of bleached sand and pebbles, of moss dried like hay. The brackish water in the pools was never still ; fish leaped and she saw the moving dorsal fins of catfish in the shoal water. On the sand along the creek were the dried remains of fish. In the intense isolation of the full sun the struggling fish in the receding water seemed to her symbolic of the fundamental brutality of that tortured country and she turned

away unhappily and went back to the house. She found Clay still sitting on the back porch, smoking a cigarette and flicking the ashes into his plate with a thoughtless carelessness that irritated her.

"I wish you wouldn't do that, Clay," she said crossly, and began to gather up the dishes.

"I'm sorry."

"It makes them a nuisance to wash," she said as she went into the kitchen.

"I know, I wasn't thinking. I'll help you wash them."

"Never mind." She bent over the sink. "There are only a few. — Haven't you anything to do this morning?"

"If the gasoline engine gets here we're going to set it up." He had followed her to the kitchen and stood behind her. "Hilda . . ."

"I've been down by the creek," she said, perversely interrupting him. "All the fishes are dying, Clay. Can't we do anything for them?"

"Not unless we pump water into the creek."

"We could seine them out and put them in the water tanks, couldn't we?"

"Yes," he said after a pause, with an air of humoring her. "We could do that."

She rattled the dishes prodigiously in the sink. Clay glanced at the sweep of her blonde hair falling to her shoulders, then he took a dishtowel from the rack.

"I can make a seine from towsacks and we can seine them to-day," he said. "We could save a few of them anyhow."

"All right." She turned to him, and now she smiled.

Clay went to the barn and as he split towsacks and stitched a seine and weighted it he felt unhappy that she must find pleasure in seining fish from a stagnant creek, that her life was so dull. He put every available bucket in the wagon, to which he hitched the mare, and they drove along an old road by the creek. Clay stopped at the first large pool they came to and they took off their shoes and waded barefooted into the water, dragging the seine and

lifting it clear of the water weighted with many-hued sunfish and moss-green perch and oily catfish whose black skin was lustrous in the sunlight. They put the fish in the buckets and drove on a quarter of a mile until they found another stagnant pool. Hilda wanted to catch every fish, and she rescued each minnow from the soggy towsacks to throw into the buckets.

"That's about as many as we ought to put in the tank," Clay said, looking in the buckets.

"Oh, Clay, just one more pool."

"We'd probably have to go half a mile to find another puddle, and then you'd want to find another. We have to stop some time."

She sat down beside him on a ledge of soapstone and they lit cigarettes. They were in the shade of a lone plane tree with the desolate prairie a burning glare around them.

"This has been amusing," Hilda said. "I hate to go back and be a farm wife again."

Clay glanced at her quickly, then put one hand on her shoulder. "I don't want you to feel you're a farm wife, Hilda. — Why don't you come out with me oftener? We'll ride the pastures together."

"It's so damned hot."

"Yes, I've never known it as bad as this. — But it won't last much longer. We're bound to have rain soon, Hilda, and summer is more than half over now. — Just another month of it."

"And then what?" Hilda said.

"Then maybe we can live like human beings again. We can forget about the heat and the drouth and try to be happy."

"I think we ought to try to be happy now, Clay."

"We'll do the best we can." He stood up, and they carried the buckets to the wagon and drove along ruts half-filled with sand up a slope to the water tank. The water was very low and after they had emptied the buckets into it they could see the fish swimming.

"The cattle won't swallow them, will they?" Hilda asked.

"They'll keep out of the way." Clay put the buckets in the

wagon and then climbed to the windmill tower to make sure the mechanism was in order. From the platform at the top he called to Hilda : "Look over yonder, toward the road."

"What is it ?"

"A prairie schooner — an old covered wagon."

Hilda saw a white wagon-sheet on the road in the distance, and she watched it as they drove back to the ranch-house. As Clay was unhitching the mare the wagon was near at hand and he walked down toward the gate, where Melvin was standing. Melvin raised one hand in greeting as the covered wagon drew near. The two horses drawing it were incredibly thin ; their rib-bones strained through the slack hide. There were deep depressions in their temples. Behind the wagon one lean cow limped on a halter.

On the high seat of the wagon Clay saw a woman's furtive face beneath a sunbonnet, beside her a thin man with a gray moustache and a fuzz of white beard on his chin. The man drew back on the reins and the emaciated horses halted, their heads drooping.

"Reckon you could spare us a little water fer the stock ?"

"Sure," Clay said. "Drive up to the windmill."

Melvin opened the gate and the great creaking wagon turned into the ranch yard. Melvin led the way to the water trough and the woman got down off the seat and went to the windmill with a bucket for water.

"Comin' in from the west ?" Melvin asked.

"Shore am. Name is Upton."

"Coleman's my name. This here is Mr. Hall."

"Howdy. — Well, you folks ain't so bad off here." He pushed his hat to the back of his head and looked out across the prairie.

"How bad is it out west ?" Melvin asked.

"How bad is it ? Well, I tell you." He paused to take a plug of tobacco from the breast pocket on his shirt. He offered it to Clay, then to Melvin, who pared off a small amount with his jack-knife. Upton bit off a large chew and said when he had crushed it to shape with hard drives of his lean jaws : "I had

a small farm and fifty head of cattle, and I had to shoot my steers before I left. Shot 'em and left 'em yonder fer the buzzards." He looked at Clay. "They're shooting cattle all over out yonder. Ain't no browse left fer 'em. Ain't no water. Ain't nothin' to do but shoot 'em." He spat into the patch of dry milkweed in which the wagon stood. "Ain't nothin' now but ragweed and dust."

The horses were snorting at the trough, jerking their heads in a jingle of harness. Dust was white in their nostrils.

"I'm goin' on to East Texas, if this team can pull that far," Upton said. "Got kinfolks yonder. Lookin' fer water to make camp on tonight."

"You won't find none now you're past the Brazos," Melvin said. "Not fer thirty-forty miles."

"The Brazos is about dried up, just a little stream of red ink in all that sand."

"You can make camp here tonight," Clay said.

"That's kind, Mister. Don't want to put you out none. Can you spare the water?"

"The tank by the windmill is about full. We've got plenty."

"Then I'm pleased to stay." He climbed down stiffly from the high seat of the wagon, stepping over the wheel-rim to the hub. "I had dirt tanks out west. Had a section of land and two dirt tanks. They dried up like mud puddles."

Upton walked over to the windmill and filled a dipper of water from the tap. As he stood drinking, with occasional reflective chews on his tobacco cud between sips, his wife returned to the wagon and untied the scrawny cow to lead to water. Blossom came out of the house then in her sunbonnet, and Melvin said: "This man just came in from the west, Blossom. Name is Upton."

"Howdy," Blossom said.

"On our way east, ma'am," Upton said. "Ain't got nothin' left but a cook-stove and a trundle bed and that sorry stock you see yonder. Cleaned out by the drouth, we was. Then the dust come on top of that. Blows in clouds, it does, like nothin' you ever seen."

"They had to shoot their cattle, Blossom," Melvin said. "What do you think of that?"

"Oh, everybody's shootin' cattle yonder. And they say Texas ain't the hardest hit. That's what they say."

"We ain't had no dust here," Blossom said. "Where does it come from?"

"Right off'n the ground, ma'am, where would you think? You just stand in the door and watch your top soil blow from here to hell'n gone. Ain't nothin' to stop it."

The Uptons drove their wagon along the lane and turned off into the creek bottom, and Mrs. Upton set the cow to stake in the pasture. Soon a thin spiral of wood smoke rose among the trees and Hilda, as she stood by the windmill looking at it, said: "Clay, what is there for those people to do?"

"I don't know. He has relatives in East Texas, he said."

"But what can they do without land? What *is* there to do when you've lost everything?"

Clay shook his head, frowning, and Blossom when she came to the windmill a moment later to draw water said: "I reckon we ain't so bad off here, Miz Hall, like he said. Our corn is burned up, but we ain't got that dust, like he said. I've seen plenty of sand storms and they're right dreary."

"Blossom, if there are any eggs and milk to spare let's give them some," Hilda said.

"Now that's just what I was thinking, Miz Hall. I reckon we can spare some. I'll fetch it fer 'em."

After dinner Clay and Hilda sat on the piazza and watched the flickering light of the Upton's campfire, and Hilda said: "Clay, it's all wrong when people like that, people who've worked all their lives, have nothing to hope for any more."

"They'll get along. They'll get government relief."

"Oh, I suppose they'll be able to exist." She turned her head impatiently away.

Soon after dusk the telephone rang and Amon's sharp, querulous phrases rang in Clay's ears as the old man shouted into the instrument. "Did that engine get there?"

"No, we've been expecting it all day."

"Well, I want it set up right away. — I'm coming out to the ranch, Clay, and spend a couple of days. You'd better send your wife to town to get me in the morning."

"All right."

"And tell her to get here before nine o'clock, Clay. I don't want to ride in the heat."

"All right," Clay said, and when he told Hilda she smiled, saying: "I'll be glad to go in and see Olivia."

"Hilda, why don't you stay in town a couple of days? The rest and the change will do you good."

"Maybe. Yes, maybe I will. Olivia ought to have someone with her." Then she looked at him sharply and turned away in silence when it occurred to her that he wanted her to stay in town while Amon was on the ranch.

Clay went to bed first and in the clear light of the kerosene burner he lay watching her as she undressed, noticing that she was still thin, that her collar bones were sharply defined through her skin. He lay waiting for her, smoking a cigarette and listening to the sonorous croaking of a single bullfrog in the one small puddle of the creek down below, where before the water had flowed deep and swift between thick water-grass on the banks. Hilda stood before the pier glass with a bowl of water beside her and the heated curling iron standing on a plate.

"Why do you do that?" he asked.

"I'm going to town tomorrow."

"But you put your hair up in curlers every single night."

"I want to look well, Clay, even if we are abandoned out here on this desolate prairie." She looked at him. "You hardly ever shave."

Clay grunted, and she thought that he sounded exactly like his grandfather. He watched her as she curled her hair and fastened it with metal clasps, her back turned to him. Once he started to speak, but seeing her expressionless face in the mirror he remained silent. He thought that her curling her hair was a subtle and deliberate retreat from him, and he ground out his cigarette viciously on the bedstead and turned his back to her. He was asleep when she went to bed beside him, and she lay look-

ing with hurt, tearful eyes at the ceiling, hopeless of solving the misunderstanding between them. Night after night there was this tension, this stubborn hesitancy in both of them to speak out frankly. Definitely they were growing apart, Hilda thought, and life seemed ugly and unsympathetic to her, when it could have been companionable and serene in spite of the days of gasping heat, the scourge of the drouth.

The sun rose through a pink haze. It was dark in the bedroom and Hilda awakened with a start to find that Clay had already gone. She hurriedly dressed and went to the kitchen. She saw him standing by the windmill with Melvin, and then she saw that the air was dusky, copper-colored, and far in the distance the haze was a deep roseate. Clay saw her on the porch.

"It's a sand storm," he called. "It looks like Upton brought it with him."

Hilda remembered hearing the sound of the west wind blowing in the trees along the creek during the night. She went out into the mist of dust, to the windmill.

"That dust is coming from a far off," Melvin said. "It ain't our soil that's blowing so much, Clay."

The dust stung their faces when they faced the wind, and Hilda's lips became dry with it ; it was engrained in the pores of her skin. Upton walked up from the creek, and they could see him grinning from a long way off. "Now you got a taste of it," he said. "Now you know what it is to swaller the soil off your own land." He wet a bandana handkerchief at the windmill and sponged his face. "But this ain't nothin'. Why, I seen the whole dang earth blow right up into the sky, black as night and as high as you could see and up at the top a pale yaller belt of it with the sun coming through. Out yonder somebody will yell 'duststorm' like they used to yell 'Indians,' and everybody runs into the house. You shut the doors and winders and stuff up the cracks with rags, but the dust sifts through like through a sieve. You got to lie down with a wet handkerchief over your face and wait fer the end of it, and afterwards you got to take and dig your livestock out like out of a snow bank, pretty

near. I tell you, it's awful. Your lungs git to achin' so it seems you can't draw another breath. I tell you, it's shore awful." He looked at Clay closely. "I reckon we'll stay on here today. Don't want to git out on the road in this here dust if I can help it."

"That's all right," Clay said.

"And, say, thanks a heap for them milk and eggs."

Clay returned to the house with Hilda. The screens of the back porch did not check the mist of flying dust and they went into the house and shut the doors. Clay telephoned to Amon Hall in Rutherford: "The dust is pretty bad out here, Senator. Maybe you'd better postpone your trip."

"Nonsense, Clay. I want to see you get that gasoline pump working right."

"We can manage that."

"Well, I want to see it. Come on into town and get me."

"Right away," Clay said, and grinned as he hung up the receiver. "The seven plagues of Egypt wouldn't stop him from coming out today, Hilda. I guess you'll have to go to town."

Clay put up the curtains on the car and it was not yet eight o'clock when Hilda started for Rutherford. The dust obscured the road and visibility was limited to a few hundred yards. The sound of the storm on the windshield was as loud as a heavy, driving rain. She was delayed by it, and it was after nine o'clock when she stopped the car in front of the bungalow in Rutherford. Amon Hall opened the door at once; he had been waiting for her.

"No need to come in," he called, but Hilda left the car and ran across the small lawn to the porch. "I want to stop and see Olivia, Senator."

"I reckon she's still asleep."

Hilda went up the stairs, and on the landing she heard Olivia's voice calling to her: "Is that you, Hilda?"

"Yes."

"Come in."

She found Olivia facing the door, raising one thin arm white as the sheet in greeting. "How are you, Olivia?"

"Not so well, dear. Not well at all today."

"Have you seen the doctor?"

"Yes. There's some sort of congestion in my chest. This dusty air doesn't help. I suppose it's unbearable on the ranch."

"It's pretty bad." Hilda sat down beside the bed. "Olivia, I'm coming back this afternoon and stay in town with you for a couple of days."

"Hilda," Amon called from below. "It's time we started."

"I don't want to bother you, Hilda. — It's a pity you can't be here when I'm up and around. We haven't shown you much of Rutherford."

"It's nine-thirty," Amon called.

"There's the regal command," Hilda said. "Our master's voice. I'll see you later, Olivia — about noon."

Amon was waiting at the front door, and as soon as they were settled in the car he asked : "Has that engine got there yet?"

"Not when I left."

"How low is the water in the tanks?"

"Pretty low — about a foot." Hilda turned the car and drove swiftly along the highway over the plains.

"I was afraid some of that dust would blow down this way," Amon said, peering out through the curtains.

"Some people from the west stopped in at the ranch last night," Hilda said. "Their farm was blown right away by the wind and their cattle had to be shot, fifty head."

"The government paid him something for them, I expect. The papers say they're shooting a thousand head of cattle a day in West Texas. Why, that whole country will be nothing but a boneyard, one big boneyard. — That's what it was fifty-five years ago, Hilda, after the buffalo disappeared. Why, people used to go out on the plains in wagons and gather up bones, to sell them for carbon and fertilizer products. — I remember when I first came to Texas, in 1876 — I was about Clay's age then, but I was a more serious boy. I knew what I was about. At that time the Staked Plains were black with buffalo herds, but three years later there wasn't a buffalo left. They just disappeared. And then the farmers moved in and plowed up the grass and planted their crops. Well, we're paying the penalty for it now.

That grass had deep roots and that's what held the top soil down when the wind blew. Why, they've been having sand storms in this country for years, but nobody has paid much attention. Nobody attached any significance to it, until now."

Amon leaned forward with one hand gripped on the door handle, saying from time to time : "Now watch where you're going, young woman. Be careful now." And when she looked ahead without answering he glanced at her sharply, with his lips pressed together.

"There was a man brought some grass into this country a long time ago," he said after a time. "It came from Australia, and it spread like a pestilence — no natural check, I suppose. It was brought here for hay and it made fine hay, but it grew everywhere and choked up the crops like weeds. A farmer hereabouts spends most of his time hoeing Johnson grass. — Now it seems to me they ought to sow that flat western country with Johnson grass and let it grow deep again like the grass was when the buffalo grazed there. That will hold the soil and they can put that land back into pasturage and raise cattle like they did at first. That's what it's suited for."

Amon had never talked so much to Hilda and she glanced at him sideways occasionally as he sat forward with his bushy eyebrows knitted, biting at his moustache.

"You see that old road yonder by the hillside, Hilda ? Well, that was the old stage road between Rutherford and Fort Worth. We used to travel it by stage coach, a five hour journey in a four-horse coach, and now you can drive it in less than an hour. They didn't even bother to follow the old road when they built this new highway. That's the way things are now. Everything is done on a big scale — thousands of men working on a road, paid by the government, with big machines to do the digging. — I tell you I've seen a heap of change in this country, young woman. I always stood for progress, but change and progress ain't the same thing. I tell you the old way of life has changed too much. People come to expect more money than they ought to get, and they expect to be taken care of by the government."

"There are a lot of people the government has to take care of

as things are now," Hilda said, watching the road. "They can't find work."

"Eh?" He peered at her. "Yes, that's true, and that's because the old way has changed so much. Now they do everything in a mass way — thousands of men working on a road, thousands of men in a factory. The day of the small man is over. The big companies are grabbing everything up and using what they can as fast as they can. You go into business and they take your business away. You buy stock and they take your money away. A man with a little land is a fool not to stick to his farming or his ranching and mind his own oats. — But if he does that along comes a drouth, or his crop is a glut on the market. — I tell you, it's a problem what to do." Amon made a sucking sound through his teeth, and remained silent on the rest of the trip. No one had seen them coming and he had to get down to open the gate, saying to Hilda: "Now drive on. Don't wait for me. Drive on."

But she stopped the car, and after he had fastened the gate and returned to the seat beside her he said vaguely: "Wastes gasoline, leaving the engine running." And as they halted beside the house he said: "Who's that yonder at the windmill?"

"That's Upton, the man from West Texas."

"What's he doing here?"

"He made camp last night and because of the dust he didn't drive on again today."

Amon grunted and got out of the car. The intensity of the dust storm had abated, but there was still a stinging film of dust in the colored air. He coughed, and in the house drank deeply of a glass of water. Then he turned to Hilda. "Where's Clay?"

"I don't know." She went out to the log house, calling to Blossom.

"She's down by the crick with Missus Upton," Upton said. "Your men folks went out yonder to the water tank." He looked up at her and smiled. "I like to sit out here and listen to the windmill turning and listen to the water pouring into that tank up yonder. It's restful."

"Did the engine come?"

"Yep, it come. They toted it out yonder in the wagon."

Hilda went back to the house and Amon, who was waiting on the porch, clapped his hands together. "So it came, eh? That's good. Yes, that's fine. — Hilda, do you suppose you could drive me out to the tank in the car? I want to see that they get it set up right."

"Let's go."

She drove along the lane to the pasture gate, and then out across the brown prairie toward the tank. Amon looked out at the grass with a frown. "There ain't enough browse there to feed a goat. Damn it, I'm going to have to give feed to that herd to keep it until the winter grass comes up. — If we don't have a good rain soon, though, the winter grass won't amount to much."

Hilda stopped the car fifty feet from the concrete tank and she and Amon got out. They heard the sound of a hammer at the base of the windmill tower and found Clay and Melvin there, mounting the engine. Amon went to look at it, moving a lever tentatively to ascertain its use, poking at the mechanism with his finger, judging it as he would a horse except there were no teeth to examine.

"It's about ready to start, Senator," Melvin said. "Where'd you git this engine at?"

"I bought it off a man in Rutherford."

"It's been used before."

"Yes, I know it has." Amon's eyebrows drew down over his bright eyes. "But it's in good shape, ain't it?"

"I reckon so."

"There's no sense in buying a new one when I can get a good one second-hand." The old man looked at Clay. "How's the water in that tank?"

"Low," Clay said. "But the windmill's been turning some this morning."

Amon walked over to the concrete tank twenty feet away, leaned over the edge to look at the water. He saw the fish swirling in the moss and straightened with a jerk. "Who put those in there?"

"Those fish?" Clay said. "They'll keep the water clean, Senator."

"Who put them there?"

"We seined them out of the creek," Hilda said, "out of the only pools we could find left where any fish were alive."

"They'll clean that moss out of the tank, Senator," Melvin said.

Amon chuckled and looked at Hilda, saying tartly: "Just like Clay's mother. She was always picking up stray poodles and tying blue ribbons around their necks."

Ten minutes later Melvin primed the engine and they started it going. Amon stood at the end of the pipe leading to the tank and waited until the water spurted out, then he clapped his hands together with satisfaction. "In two days it ought to be full up. Clay, you and Melvin keep close watch on it. Don't let it stop pumping in the night, and keep that tank full from now on."

"Well, I reckon," Melvin said.

Hilda drove the old man back to the ranch-house, and he went at once to the windmill where Upton sat.

"They tell me you were driven out of West Texas by the dust."

"That's right. Stuck it out as long as we could. Stuck it out till the cattle had to be shot and there warn't no water and the chickens was buried alive. Stuck it out till my whole dang farm blowed away. That's a fact."

Amon pushed his hat back. "That your outfit yonder under the trees?"

"Yep. Got two sorry-looking horses and a foot-sore cow. That team brung us this far anyhow. Surprised me, they did."

"I reckon the government paid you for the cattle they shot. I hear that's what is going on."

"Shore did. Twelve dollars a head, and I paid the money right over to the bank."

"You did, eh?" Amon frowned. "Yes. Yes, that's the way it is." He scratched his chin with a forefinger. "Where are you headed to?"

"East Texas way."

"Starting off again tomorrow, I suppose?"

"I reckon."

Amon nodded and turned abruptly away, and Upton sat by the windmill looking after him with a curious half-smile on his thin, bloodless lips. Hilda had gone to the house and was packing a suitcase and when Amon found her there he cocked his head on one side. "What's this? Where are you going?"

"Back to Rutherford to stay with Olivia. I'll be there while you're on the ranch, so she won't be left alone."

"There's a nigger there, and from the looks of this dust . . ." He turned to the window. "Yes, from the looks of this dust I may not stay the night here. I'll start home about nightfall."

"Oh," Hilda said.

"You can drive me into town then."

She looked closely at him, but there was not in his eye the impish, taunting look she had expected. She said, "Yes, all right," and closed and fastened the suitcase. Listlessly then she went about preparing luncheon, building a fire in the stove. The chimney would not draw well because of the storm and the kitchen filled with smoke; she was forced to open the door and windows for relief from the smoke and the stifling heat, and dust blew in, sifting finely on the oilcloth of the table, on the enamel sink. Her shoes left tracks on the floor and when she shut the door again it was necessary to sweep the kitchen thoroughly. She leaned limply on the broom handle in the heat with an exhausting anger at the persistent discomfort.

When Clay returned with Melvin he was surprised to find her there. First he adjusted the damper of the stove and fanned away smoke with his hat. Then he said: "I thought you would be on your way to town by now."

"No. He thinks he may not stay the night."

"That's too bad."

"Yes, I promised Olivia I'd return right away."

"I know how you feel," Clay said slowly, "losing your chance to get away from me for a while. But you can go tonight and stay until the next time he comes out here."

"Oh, Clay, it isn't that I want to get away from you. You know that. — But we are on each other's nerves, aren't we? Maybe it will help."

"Yes, I think you need a vacation." He left her then, abruptly, and she did not see him again until they were in the close hot dining room, grouped around the table, where Amon ate crackers and milk with a steady, sucking sound.

"Clay," he said when he had finished eating, had wiped his lips roughly with a napkin and leaned back in his chair now limp and relaxed with his spectacles low on his nose. "Clay, how much of that Johnson grass hay is there in the barn?"

"I don't know, Senator."

"Well, we'll look it over after lunch. We've got to feed it to the herd, and that kafir corn too. That's a job for you. And when that runs out we'll have to get some cottonseed cake. Yes, I'm afraid I'll have to buy some. Those cattle need to be fed or they'll be as thin as that West Texas farmer's stock."

"We have water anyhow."

"Yes, we have water, but I never saw the feed so poor in this country. I never did. When I first came here, Clay, you wouldn't believe it, but the grass was higher than my waist — and I'm a tall man."

"We have a little grass left," Clay said. "It's brown and dry and withered, but it's still grass."

"It ain't enough." Amon got up from the table, and just before lying down for his afternoon nap he said with violence: "Damn it, too many things happen all at once. I didn't think I'd have to buy any feed in summer when the grass ought to be as sweet as hay."

Clay walked out to the barn and while Hilda was washing the dishes she heard the sound of hammer blows, then silence again, and Clay did not return. But later she heard quick sharp taps with a hammer and scuffed her way through the dust to the barn. The hammering was in the saddle-house and she found Clay there, stretching a canvas. He looked up at her in a guilty manner, then grinned. "I couldn't stand it any longer. I'm going to try a sketch of this sun and dust. Look at it!"

In the distance the air was rainbow colored as the sun shone through the mist of dust, predominantly a faded chrome yellow that had depth and warmth.

"I'll get your paints," Hilda said excitedly. "Where are they?"

"Somewhere in the house."

She hurried back through the dust and went on a swift and silent search through bureau drawers, the closet, the old oaken wardrobe, until at last she found his sketch-box, gray with dust, behind a woodbox at the fireplace. She tip-toed out again without awakening Amon and ran across the bare hot ground to the saddle-house. She helped him sort out the tubes, mix linseed oil and turpentine for his medium, and then sat with him near the barn door where he set up his easel. On a bale of hay with her legs drawn under her, she watched the painting take form on the canvas. He painted the color, with long sweeping contrasts, at first with little attention to form, and Hilda sat breathlessly watching him, happier than she had been in weeks, hesitant to speak as if fearing to break a spell. He painted the wagon-sheet of the Uptons' wagon among the pecan trees, reflecting an amber light. He sketched it in roughly and the trees dark and blue, almost ultramarine pure behind it, in heavy outline. And as he worked the sketch took on a more literal form than his previous paintings, but free and with elastic movement of color. Hilda sat watching him, and when he made a fumbling movement toward the pocket of his blue shirt she leaned forward with a cigarette she had already lit for him and he smiled, seeing her for a moment, before he turned back to his palette. Once he said, "I think I've got something," but he did not glance back at her and appeared not to have heard her warm, enthusiastic murmur. The sun was shining in glorious color through the haze now, and gradually it became apparent that the dust was vanishing, that the still air was clearing, and at last overhead Hilda saw blue sky. And a moment later she heard Amon calling to Clay. Clay did not look up from the canvas ; he had not heard. Hilda went out into the sunlight and saw Amon standing by the white picket fence near the house.

"Hilda, where is Clay?" He walked forward, peering toward the corrals. "Where are those horses? It's clear enough to ride out and look at the cattle."

Hilda went to meet him.

"Where did you say Clay was?"

"He's in the barn. He'll be along soon."

Amon strode past her toward the barn, and as he came into the shade, before his eyes were accustomed to the gloom, he called: "Clay, where are you?"

"Right here, Senator."

"Yes, oh yes. — What's that you're doing — painting a picture?"

"Yes, how do you like it?"

"It looks all right. — Clay, it's clear enough to ride now. Let's saddle up."

"I'd like to finish this sketch first."

Hilda waited in the doorway, looking at the old man as he stood over Clay, biting at his moustache and for an instant reflecting what to say, discarding the first words that came to his mind. At length he said briskly: "This is a cattle ranch, boy, not an art gallery. Come along, now, put away your paints."

Clay sighed and Hilda with a sinking feeling saw him put his palette aside; for a moment she had hoped that he would insist on completing the sketch. Amon Hall looked at her then with a smile and rubbed his hands together. "Well, young woman, I suppose I'll stay the night after all. It looks like we've seen the last of that dust."

"Then I'm going on to town," Hilda said abruptly. She whirled around and walked across the hot yard to the house. Again her shoes left tracks on the floors she had swept not long before. She caught up her hat and took the suitcase from the foot of the bed and in her jodhpurs went to the car. She started the motor and as she drove away Clay was standing by the corral gate watching her. She drove to the main road and when she got out to open the gate she turned back to wave to him, but he had gone from sight into the saddle-house. She drove very fast along the rutted dirt road toward the highway.

Clay did not know what to do in moments such as this. As he dragged the saddles down from the rails he was puzzled at their brief moments of companionship together, then the perverse, the unresolved clash. In the barn he had felt a peaceful understanding with her, but a few minutes later she had driven madly off without looking back at him, without saying goodbye. But in the heat and the activity, with Amon calling to him, Clay did not think long about the impasse between them, although his mood was colored for the day. It was his temperament always to wait, never to take the initiative, but to wait for some ripe moment that never came, to postpone indefinitely the time when they should sit together and discuss their relationship and objectively seek a solution.

Melvin had caught the horses and Clay saddled them, strapping the cinches as tightly as he could, pulling fiercely on the leather. And in the saddle, as they rode across the plain, he remained silent, not listening to Amon as he talked. First they rode to the water tank, where the old man dismounted and poked at the gasoline engine, listened to its rhythmic pumping, then examined the pipe leading to the tank and measured the depth of the water there. He could not withhold another comment about the fish, saying, "We can stock every water tank in the county next spring, Clay."

Then they rode across a draw and over a hill into a copse of evergreen and through it to the trees of the creek, where it swept in a great half-circle through the ranch. There was some comment for nearly every steer they saw, and an exclamation of satisfaction when he inspected the big brindle animal that had been dosed with arsenic for screw worm. "He looks all right, Clay. Yes, he does. You did a good job, I should say."

Riding back toward the ranch-house Amon jogged ahead and Melvin fell back beside Clay, resting the wind-broken bay horse.

"Clay, them steers are losing weight."

"Yes, the Senator says we're to start feeding them."

"That will make more work fer us, Clay." Melvin grinned. "But they shore need it." He swung his bridle-reins in a circle, twirling his wrist. "Last night I was talking to this feller Upton.

He said you could see every bone in the bodies of them steers out west. It shore is a bad year fer the cattleman, Clay, and the farmer too. You know, all my life the thing I most wanted was to own some land of my own. I figured I'd like to have a farm and land I could call my own and live on all my life and have seven sons to work when I started aging. But now I don't know. There ain't much place fer the small farmer now-a-days, Clay."

Clay shook his head, silent, and Melvin said : "The thing I'd like to be — I've always had it in the back of my head, ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. I used to pick flowers on a hill and keep 'em as long as I could without their dying. The thing I'd like to be, Clay — leaving out farming, that is — is a florist. Yes sir. I'd like to have a flower store in a big town like Rutherford." He looked with half-closed eyes at the sere and dreary slope ahead of them, saying : "It would be nice to go to work mornings, wouldn't it, and come into a store that smelled sweet of fresh flowers — roses and violets and them things, Clay. — I had a book about flowers when I was a boy and I learned damned near every flower that grows, by its looks in a picture anyhow. — I tell you, that's the life, Clay. There couldn't be no sweeter job than a florist's — no dust there, Clay, and no red ants. No cockle-burrs nor prickly pears and no hot sun and south winds to burn up your corn crop. — Clay, do you know what a delphinium is ?"

"Yes."

"Well, I never seen one, but I know what they look like. The stalks grow up to six feet high, they say, and a cluster of flowers up high. I'd have them things in my store, Clay. I shore would, and plenty of cornflowers together with it, and gardenias and pussy-willows and such-like." Melvin chuckled. "I like that name — delphinium." He stared across the dusty prairie and sighed. "Well, maybe some day it will come about."

As they were riding down the lane toward the ranch-house they heard a thin high long-drawn cry of "Mel-vin," and saw Blossom standing by the windmill, waving her sunbonnet. Melvin raised his arm and she dropped the sunbonnet and ran back toward

the house. They saw Upton, leaning against the water tank, raise one hand and beckon.

"Something seems to be up," Amon said. "Clay, ride on and see what the fuss is about."

But Melvin had already forced the wind-broken bay to a wheezing lope; the horse's hoofs rang drum-like on the hard road. When Melvin galloped into the ranch yard and pulled the bay up, Upton jerked his hand with a motion of a stiff thumb toward the house. "Baby's sick."

Melvin swung from the horse, tossing the reins over its head to the ground.

"Ain't nothing you can do," Upton said. "Missus Upton is in yonder. Just the colic, I reckon."

Melvin ran toward the house and Blossom met him at the door, her hair straggling to her shoulders, pulled loose from the knot at the back, her hazel eyes wide and lustreless. "She's got convulsions, Melvin — fer God's sake git the doctor."

He started to go past her into the house but she pushed him away. "Now you phone the doctor, you hear?"

Melvin ran to the ranch-house and when Amon and Clay rode into the yard they heard him shouting into the telephone: "Yes, right away, she's took bad."

Upton looked up at Clay and grinned. "I reckon it ain't so serious as the women folks make out like."

"I know a lot about babies," Amon said, getting down stiffly from his horse. "I raised two generations. What's the matter with it?"

"Got a cramp of some sort."

Amon walked across to the house, taking his time, and opened the screen door. "What's the matter with the child, Blossom?"

The two women were beside the crib, and he walked over and looked at the blue face of the baby, her thighs drawn close to her stomach.

"She's got convulsions, Senator," Blossom said breathlessly. "It must be that dust done it. I was careful. I had her inside and I kept her face sponged clean. — Oh my God, the doctor will be an hour coming from Briar Forks."

"Clay." Amon turned his head to the door. "Run and heat some water, as fast as you can. Plenty hot and lots of it." He took off his seersucker coat. "The first thing to do is to put it in hot water and relax the muscles," he said crisply. "Blossom, have you got anything in its mouth?"

"In her mouth, Senator?"

"So she won't bite her tongue off. Put something between its teeth."

"A teething ring, maybe?" Blossom asked gaspingly.

"Give it here. Quick about it, Blossom. — And you women get a tub ready, you hear."

He leaned over the crib, prying open the baby's mouth to insert the hard rubber teething ring.

"Now you stay out of here," Mrs. Upton called fussily to Melvin as she went busily about the room with a great deal of noise but accomplishing little, searching aimlessly for towels and then for soap as if to bathe the infant. But Melvin came into the house and Amon, finding him at his elbow, sent him away. "You're no good here, Melvin. You see that Clay has plenty of wood for the stove. I want that hot water as quick as I can get it."

Melvin ran to the wood pile, stumbled over the chopping block. He fell to his knees and began to gather up stove wood as if he had knelt expressly for that purpose. With his arms full he ran to the house and threw the wood in the woodbox in the kitchen. The fire was burning strongly and Clay had put every available kettle and saucepan over the blaze. Melvin put his finger in one of the kettles and said: "It ain't hardly warm yet, Clay."

"Give it time, Melvin. I just put it on. It hasn't been a minute yet."

"Seems like a long time to me."

Melvin walked nervously out to the back porch, looking toward the log house. Through the window he could see Amon Hall, in his shirt-sleeves, bending over the crib, then Blossom's white face. She called to him: "Melvin, is that water ready?"

"In just a minute, gal."

"Hurry with it, please."

Melvin returned to the kitchen. His red face was studded with small globules of sweat. "Now what caused it, Clay? What's the matter? What are convulsions?"

"Cramps, Melvin."

"Oh, cramps." Melvin was relieved, then he licked his dry lips. "But not ordinary cramps, Clay?"

"Don't worry, Melvin. That won't help any."

"But Jesus, Clay, she's all I got left, her and Blossom. My corn is burned up, I got no money. I ain't got nothing but Blossom and Louise."

"Take this kettle to the Senator and see if it's hot enough," Clay said.

"Shore will." Melvin snatched the kettle and ran heavily across the porch, across the yard to the log house. A moment later he came running out again. "Bring the rest, Clay. It's all right. Bring the rest."

Between them they carried the pans of hot water to the log house and Mrs. Upton took them from their hands and poured them in the tub, then hurried them out of doors. Inside they heard the high, strangling wails of the baby. Melvin saw his horse cropping a patch of brown Bermuda grass and, wanting something to do, led it to the corral and unsaddled it. He unsaddled the other horses, glancing from time to time toward the log house, and turned them out to pasture.

"Folks git used to calamity," Upton said, and Clay turned to find the man at his elbow, chewing a straw. "I seen so much of it I don't git excited now. Reckon the baby will die?"

Clay shook his head.

"I reckon it will. — Everything terrible you can think of can happen up and happens these days, it looks like."

Just then Amon came out of the house, putting on his coat, and when Melvin saw him he ran from the corral. "Senator, how is she?"

"We've done all we can," Amon said. "Now we can only wait for that doctor. She seems to be a little easier."

"Does she now?"

"Yes, but that don't mean another bad convulsion won't come along."

"Jesus," Melvin said. "Jesus Christ."

"When did the doctor say he'd be here, Melvin?"

"Right away, he said."

Melvin turned away, rubbing his hands together until his fingers ached. He stood with his feet wide apart, in the hot sun, looking at the old house, and there rose in him the burning indignation, the sense of injustice, that had been smouldering from the day he went into the corn field and chopped the dry stalks with his hoe. He felt helpless and insecure. In a china jar in the log house there were four dollars and eighty cents, all the money he had — all the money he had for the doctor's bill — and for one visit it would be three dollars — for necessities, to care for his wife and child, to buy gasoline for his automobile, to buy needed food at Briar Forks. There would be nothing until the next year, no crops until the spring ; for a year he must feed his family and care for his child on only ten dollars a month. That winter they would eat, every day and Sunday, salt-rising bread and beans and cream gravy, and salt pork would be a treat. He swung suddenly about, the heat burning on his temples where blood now pounded. "Senator."

Amon had started on toward the house. "Yes, Melvin?"

"I'd like to talk to you, Senator."

"Well, come inside out of the sun. Your baby will be all right, Melvin. Don't take on about it."

Melvin followed the old man into the house and watched him sink into a rocking chair by the stone fireplace in the front room. Beyond the sun spread a brilliant sheen on the bare prairie. Melvin's face was wet with perspiration and he put his hands in the pockets of his overalls, cleared his throat.

"I don't know what I'm goin' to do," he said slowly. "Senator, I ain't got five dollars to my name. My corn is plumb burned up. My baby's sick and I've got doctor's bills. I don't know what to do, I tell you."

"Just quit worrying, Melvin," Amon said easily, looking into the black fireplace. "That won't help any."

"I got to worry. I got a family to look out fer, Senator. They got only me to depend on and I got to look out fer their rights." He rubbed one hand across his mouth and chin and took it away with the palm wet. "Senator, I got to have some money. I ain't asking fer anything I ain't entitled to. We agreed you was to pay me ten dollars a month and that's all right, but when we made that agreement we was planting cotton. Senator, don't you reckon I ought to have some part of that cotton money?" He drew a deep breath, meeting the old man's small bright eyes. "It's due me, ain't it? We planted cotton *last* year . . ." His voice trailed off.

Amon stood up. "What put that idea into your head?"

"I just been thinking it over, that's all. Why, Senator, I can't live through the year on ten dollars a month. Jesus, I got a wife, I got a baby. Jesus." Melvin shifted his feet on the faded rag rug and Amon sat down again by the fireplace. "I worked hard fer you, Senator. I done the best I could. — Last year we had a good crop of cotton and we shared it, Senator."

"Of course we did, Melvin," Amon said mildly. He looked up at the young man's red, sweaty face. "I hire you to farm this land for me, boy."

"But, Senator, it ain't right. By God it ain't. Last year we farmed cotton and this year we don't, and you git paid fer it and I don't."

Clay had been standing by the door, listening, and he was surprised at Amon's quiet manner, his toneless voice. He sat deep in the armchair with his hands lying flat along his thighs, saying: "I own that land, Melvin, not you. I can hire anybody I want to farm it or not to farm it, just as I please."

"Not fer ten dollars, Senator."

Amon looked up over his shoulder at Melvin. "Now don't take on so. You have nothing to worry about. I'll help you out, when the need comes."

"Is that right, Senator?"

"Of course I will. I won't pay you any of that money for the cotton, though, because you ain't entitled to it. But I'll help you out, Melvin, when the time comes."

"Well, I'm shore glad of that, Senator. Thank you, sir."

"Don't I hear an auto down at the gate?" Amon asked, without looking toward the window.

"Yes — it's the doctor." Melvin ran out of the house and Amon glanced after him and saw Clay in the doorway.

"You heard that, did you, Clay?"

"Yes."

"Whose work was that, do you suppose?" Amon grunted. "It ain't like Melvin to do that."

"He was over-wrought," Clay said. "Worried about his baby." Through the window Clay saw Melvin running to open the gate. "But he's right, Senator."

"What do you mean he's right?"

"He ought to have a share of that money," Clay said, coming into the room. "Or else he ought to have his salary raised in proportion. If he's not allowed to farm . . ."

"I didn't expect you to take any such attitude," Amon said stiffly, but he turned his eyes away. "Anyhow I needed that cash money." He moved his shoulders uneasily against the chair back. "I'll see to it that Melvin gets along all right. I promised him that."

Clay stood in the doorway looking with contempt at the round melon of the old man's head, his large red ears, for the first time seeing as clearly as Hilda had the grasping selfishness of his nature, treasuring the few hundred dollars of "cash money" miser-like. He turned away and left Amon sitting by the fireplace. He went to the windmill and sat there with Melvin and Upton, waiting while the doctor was in the log cabin and feeling with Melvin intense relief when later it was known that the baby was no longer in danger.

"I tell you," the doctor said, "Senator Hall missed his calling. I couldn't have done much better with the child myself."

"I'm obliged to him," Melvin said to Clay. "I reckon I acted too hasty, didn't I? But I was scared, Clay. I didn't hardly know what I was doing."

"To get what you want I guess you have to fight for it," Clay said.

HILDA sat in Olivia's bedroom, in a wicker chair beside a vase of yellow roses, saying in a strong quick voice the phrase that had passed through her mind again and again on the dusty drive to Rutherford : "Olivia, I've had enough of it."

"What's the matter, dear ?" Olivia lay with her cheek on the pillow, her eyes a bright blue against her wax-like skin.

"I don't like to make you my confessor. I don't want to throw off on you, Olivia," Hilda said. "But I've got to talk to someone. Today it happened again. Clay got out his paints and started to work, and he was himself again. His whole manner changed, and I felt that we were beginning all over. — But then *he* came out to the barn with one of his remarks — just a snide sort of rebuke, and Clay put his paints away without another word. Olivia, what can you *do* ?"

"I know how it is," Olivia said softly. "I've seen it with Mark Hall, and then again with Clay. Mark lived with Papa even after he was married, Hilda. He didn't want to be a lawyer, but Papa insisted, and all those years he was little more than an office boy for Papa, doing stenographic work. Papa never let him take an important case, and I used to tell Mark he ought to break away and open his own office, but he never could do it."

"What I resent is that I can't talk to Clay about it any more. He won't listen to me. His mind seems to close up and his eyes look off into the distance. He feels that I'm too critical of everything, and that I'm unfair. Really, I can't endure it."

"So much of it is the heat, Hilda, and this dust on top of that. It's hard on everyone's nerves." Olivia's voice had become vaguely apologetic and Hilda looked at her sharply and laughed. "You too, Olivia," she said. "You don't like to hear my criticism, do you ?"

"Oh, Hilda, nothing of the sort."

"Yes. Secretly you feel that you understand Clay and the Senator, and I don't, isn't that it ?"

"I'm not defending Papa, Hilda, but I do understand him," Olivia said. "He started out as a sort of reformer. He set very

strict standards for himself and he always expected everyone else to live up to standards just as rigid. He's disappointed when they don't and he never questions whether his standards are right." She smiled. "Oh, everybody hated him when I was little, all the children I mean, and they grew up disliking him. It was he who made the rule that children couldn't sit in the back pews of the church, because they made so much noise. He was deacon then, and he considered himself sort of a censor of the public morals. He's always done things like that. It's his nature. And painting seems just dilly-dallying to him and it always will. He doesn't think it's productive. Clay could be a great artist and it would mean nothing to Papa."

"And you like that about him, don't you, Olivia?"

"Well, it's consistent, Hilda."

"Yes, and I suppose it's admirable. — But it's his effect on other people that isn't, Olivia. He hasn't the right to misdirect Clay's life. That's what he's trying to do and he's succeeding. I can't help it. There's some sort of loyalty in Clay that blocks me, and because of it he's actually begun to dislike me. — And I'm as stubborn as he is, Olivia, oh, I know that. I know that one of us has to give in, but I don't want it to be me. I don't think it's right to settle an issue just on the basis of sex, do you?"

"Eh, what's that?" Olivia look startled.

"I mean make up in bed."

"Goodness," Olivia said.

"It's not feminine of me. — But he ought to make the advances, Olivia, not me. And I want this thing settled, really settled. It's gotten now so I can't stand it, Olivia. I'm going away."

"Hilda! you mean leave Clay?"

"If he won't come with me."

"But where would you go?"

"To New York. I can find a job there, and Clay could do commercial work. He would be good at it, and it wouldn't harm his painting any more than this atmosphere he's in now. — I don't see how he endures it."

"Well," Olivia said faintly. "Well . . ."

"What do *you* think, Olivia?"

"I don't know, Hilda. Goodness, don't ask me." Olivia clasped her hands together on the coverlet. "I was never one to give advice. — I don't know what to say. But I do remember this. When he was ill Mark called me in and told me to help Clay to be a man. Mark always thought he'd wasted his own life and he wanted Clay to be different. He wanted Clay to act for himself."

"Clay won't act for himself," Hilda said.

"I don't know. Maybe it's best to do something bold. I never dared to. Yes, I suppose you both ought to go away. Yes, you should, in the fall when Papa won't need Clay so much."

"If Clay doesn't go with me I'll go alone," Hilda said, and Olivia, lying pale in the bed, looked out at the dust-laden sycamore trees, now leprous from the drouth, and made no response.

Hilda went to the yellow gabled house late in the afternoon to summon Ina, and found old Clemmy pushing the lawnmower along by the hedge.

"Clemmy, you shouldn't work in weather like this," she said sharply.

"They gimme a fifty cent piece to do it, ma'am." He wiped the perspiration from his mottled face with the frayed sleeve of his shirt. "My, dis sholy am a front lawn, ain't it? About de bigges' in town, I reckon."

"Where is Ina?" Hilda asked, frowning.

"Out de back way."

Clemmy walked beside her around the house and through a trellised gate. Ina was washing clothes in a little side room of the servants' house that opened out on a flight of three sagging steps. Water was heating in a big tub in the open, beneath which a charcoal burner sizzled.

"Hello dere, Miss Hilda," Ina said. "Clemmy, is you thu a'ready?"

"No'm, I ain't thu. I jest come back fer a drink of water." The old Negro went down on his knees by a hydrant that was almost concealed in tall brown grass. The water came out brown with pipe rust, staining the grass tobacco-colored.

"I'm going to stay in town for a couple of days, Ina," Hilda said.

"A'righty, Miss Hilda. — Clemmy, don't you drink so much. It'll give you de fevah. How much mo' work you got to do out front?"

"I got a plenty, Miss Ina."

"Youbettahmunchahunkofco'npone den, to keep up yo' strength. Looky now, dere's a cut of it in de house on de table."

"Thanky kindly, Miss Ina, I'll make tracks fer it," Clemmy said eagerly, and started away. His bent knee struck hard against the wash tub and he bent over in pain. The tub hung in balance for a moment then slowly toppled to the ground, the charcoal burner falling with it. Hot water cascaded over the dry grass, and pieces of smoking charcoal bounded along behind. Some of them rolled beneath the low steps of the servants' house.

"Now looky what you done," Ina snapped angrily. She hurried down the steps and caught the rim of the burner with an old rag to protect her hands. "Now you git down on yo' knees and git dem chunks of charcoal from under dem steps."

Hilda helped the old man take the charcoal into the open, and Clemmy began picking up the pieces with two sticks and putting them in the burner, saying: "Dey's still a-burnin'. It'll warm de water quick up again, Miss Ina."

"I'll turn a hose into de tub," Ina said. "You git on back and finish yo' work, Clemmy."

The old man limped away, and Ina replaced the tub on the burner and attached a hose to the hydrant to fill it again.

"He's too old to do that hard work," Hilda said.

"Ain't it de truf, ma'am. If de Sen'tor had a horse as old as Clemmy he'd put him out to pasture now, wouldn't he? But Clemmy says he needs dat fo' bits fer snuff." She straightened her back. "An' it ain't easy workin' over dem hot boilers today. — I reckon I'll be late dis evenin', count o' dat water being spilled."

"I'll fix supper for Olivia and me then," Hilda said.

"Will you, ma'am? I'll come wash de dishes after."

Hilda walked thoughtfully back along the hot street to the

bungalow. The pavement stung her feet through the soles of her shoes and radiated unbearable heat into her face. . . . The sight of the old Negro pushing the lawnmower had intensified her mood, had made her now feel purposeful and determined.

Later, when she brought Olivia's supper to her in bed, the older woman put a thin hand on Hilda's arm and said: "I missed Clay so much the four years he was away. I've been selfish in wanting to keep him here now that he's come home again. And I wanted to keep you too, Hilda. — But you're right. You both ought to go away, and I'll tell Clay that. I'll talk to him, Hilda, the next time I'm able to go to the ranch."

Hilda, with her eyes wet, bent to kiss Olivia's cheek.

That night Hilda slept in a small bedroom next to Olivia's, under the eaves of the bungalow, and the radiation of heat from the sun-scorched roof was stifling. She lay in bed looking out at the stars, thinking that for the first time since their first night together she and Clay were separated, and feeling relief that for this night there would not be the nerve tension of lying beside him, almost hating him, wanting to seize his hair and pull it, to shriek at him, "Damn you, Clay, either let's love each other or hate each other. We can't be strangers." He was so different from the Clay she had met on the quay at Saint Tropez — it seemed years ago — so different from the light-hearted, casual Clay who had rushed to her in Paris and taken her to share the *pavillon* with him in the green garden of the Rue d'Alésia. Now she realized how far he had been from his environment and how completely he had returned to it. The change in him had been to retrograde. Hilda threw out her arms, spread across the width of the narrow bed, breathing shallowly of the tepid air. She lay quite still staring at the ceiling, at a bar of light cast by a street lamp at the corner. She lay remembering sunlight on the hatchet-shaped harbor of Toulon, sunlight in the bright bedroom of Madame Malet's apartment where Clay had called on her. Now she knew the explanation of his manner with her at first, when he had seemed distant, when he had let her return to Paris without apparent interest. She knew he had been avoiding any close relationship with another because of his searching

for a freedom of his own, and she understood that now he was resentful of her criticism because he could not admit that he had not found his independence and had returned to Texas again. It was her regret that she had ever urged him to return home, that she had lacked the courage then to find with him a direction for themselves in New York. Clay had needed a certain subtle guidance, and she had failed to supply it, she thought, and now when she tried to do so it seemed to be too late. She was thinking again of the Mediterranean, blue in sunlight, blue-gold under the moon, and a great watery volume of color enveloped her mind as she was falling asleep. Then she became wide awake with a start, sitting upright in bed, and with scattered thoughts listening to a great noise in the street below. It was the piercing, the infinite screaming toward crescendo, of sirens ; with it the full deep roar of the engines of fire trucks. The window sill was lit with a lobster glow, shifting into a sinister purplish shadow on the wall. Hilda sprang from bed and ran to the window and through the trees she saw bright flames, she heard the subdued crackle of the fire, loud in the airless night. Then she heard Olivia calling to her and she opened the door to the hall. Olivia was there in a quilted kimono.

“Hilda, is it the house ?”

“It’s down the street, Olivia. I can’t tell.”

“It *is* our house, Hilda.”

“Wait a minute. I’ll find out.” Hilda ran back to her room and stepped into a skirt, losing her balance and falling against the bed. She snatched up a jersey sweater and put it on, thrust her feet bare into slippers. When she returned to the hall Olivia was not there. She was not in her bedroom. Hilda ran downstairs, out to the porch of the bungalow, and in the flicker of the distant fire she saw Olivia running along the sidewalk ahead of her, a ghostly figure in the night.

“Olivia, wait !” Hilda went flying over the lawn, down the street in pursuit. And as she ran she saw that it was the old yellow house that was afire. She saw one of the tall gables, static and strong in outline against the flames. She remembered the charcoal burner showering coals on the dry grass and then she

knew that a piece of charcoal had remained to smoulder under the steps, to ignite the dry tinder of the rotting wood.

She caught Olivia at the corner as she was stepping over a firehose into the street.

“Olivia, you’re barefooted !” Hilda cried, but Olivia went on, passing through the arc of light cast by a fire truck. Ahead of them dense black smoke rose to the sky, blotting out the stars, and flames leaped high in the smoke ; flames climbed up the network of ivy on the side of the house with a loud crackling noise.

Olivia stopped beside a tree, one hand on the trunk of the sycamore she had watched grow from a sapling until its boughs overhung the street and the hedge. She stood looking at the house where she had been born, where she had always lived, now a stiff skeleton with entrails of fire. She stood with her feet in grass which had turned brown and crisp in the drouth, now wet with leakage from the firehose laid across the lawn, flooded now after the long drouth with the deluge of disaster.

“Hilda,” Olivia said. “It’s not possible. — What could have happened ?”

“You ladies will have to get back the other side of the hedge,” a man said roughly. In the firelight his white varnished fireman’s helmet gleamed. Then his tone altered. “Oh, hello, Miss Olivia. It’s too bad about your house. We’ll do all we can. But you-all stay back where it’s safe.”

“Olivia, you must come back to bed,” Hilda said.

“That’s right. That’s the best place for you, Miss Olivia. We’ll save all we can.”

“But the house . . .” Olivia said in a faltering voice.

“I’m afraid it’s done for, ma’am. The pressure’s pretty low — this drouth, you know . . .”

“Hilda, I’ve got to stay here,” Olivia said.

“Then come away. — Olivia, you’re standing in wet grass ! Come over here and sit on the carriage block.”

“Yes, that’s all right,” the fire chief said.

Olivia went with Hilda, clinging to her hand, to the standstone carriage block and they sat down. Hilda took off her own slippers to put them on Olivia’s feet, holding her thin ankles firmly.

Olivia did not even notice ; she was sitting erect with her kimono wrapped around her, staring at the burning house. Olivia's feet were wet and Hilda dried them with her skirt, chafing them briskly to stimulate the circulation before putting on the slippers.

Olivia stared with wet eyes at the rounded corner of the house that rose tower-like to a gable. There her room had been, boat-shaped, over-looking the street, and in the glowing firelight there came a sudden clear mental picture of the night she had stood at the window and watched the torch-light parade which had lit the hanging leaves of the sycamores with the same garish flicker in the night. She remembered Amon Hall standing on the piazza down below her, making a speech. He had won the nomination for Senator in the Democratic primaries and he had become overnight the famous citizen of the town. He had stood on the piazza in a black suit, with a high collar and black knitted necktie, and she remembered the stiff pompous gestures of his oratory as he leaned awkward as a scarecrow against the piazza hand-rail in the light of the torches. His hair and moustache had been black then and his eyes had gleamed with the fascination of a raven's bauble. And she remembered how Mark Hall had stood in the shadow on the piazza, watching his father, how he had worked until late at night during the campaign. He had asked to go to Washington as Amon's secretary, but with his uncompromising severity the old man had ruled against it, saying : *I'll put none of my relations on the government payroll, Mark. It don't seem honest.* And when he had served his term Amon did not run again ; he returned to his law practice and the ranch with the prestige he had objectively sought for prestige alone. And Mark, denied his father's reflected glory in Washington, was shadowed by it all his life. If Amon did not take his son seriously, Mark had little chance of impressing others, and in the Senator's law office, working for him, never trying an important case, Mark had assumed the pallor of a clerk of life service. At the other corner of the house, where flames now curled from the windows, he had died, saying : *Make Clay a man, Olivia.*

"Olivia, come home to bed," Hilda said. "Please do."

"No. Oh, no. — Hilda, it's in the attic now. Look, there's fire through the shingles of the gable."

"Yes," Hilda said, pressing the thin hand that clung to hers.

Fire in the attic ; it probed with a hot scarlet light the most sheltered recess of Olivia's being. Always, from her childhood, the attic had been her sanctuary ; in winter when the north wind rattled against the roof, in summer when the heat was suffocating. There she had kept her treasures ; there she had gone as a girl to dress in the discarded finery of her mother, in bustles, in pleated velvet dresses and high laced shoes ; to pirouette with parasol on the dusty, creaking boards. Now the old trunks were filled with priceless souvenirs, the heaps of silk and velvet, the photographs and parasols, the cushion stuffed with balsam she had brought home from Colorado in returning from months away from Texas after the flood — all these things were feeding the flames that now burst up through the shingled roof of the yellow gable. There had still been a trace of the strong scent of balsam in the pillow when she had last looked at it in the attic, and she remembered the frayed gold braid lettering spelling out : *Souvenir of Colorado Springs, Col.* She had kept the pillow in her room for years afterwards, until at last it found its way to the trunk in the attic with the other mementos of her girlhood. Amon had met her at the station when she returned, giving her a sharp look, saying : *Well, you look better than you did.* And that was the only reference he ever made to the hysteria of the months before. But then, later, when he began to sit upon the porch, silent, while nervous young men attempted conversation, Olivia had been puzzled at first and rebellion had gathered in a tight hard clot within her. And gradually, from looks he gave her, from remarks he made, from a clumsy searching in his questions, she understood. *I suppose someone will come along and marry you, Olivia*, he had said, *Yes, I suppose it will all be forgotten.* He had been thinking of the bananewood buggy, of the night alone together, and at last she knew of his suspicion and why he kept forbidding vigil on the piazza with her beaux. It had taken so long for her to realize it ; she had been an innocent girl,

idealistic and not a realist. Her mother had told her the responsibilities of womanhood, in a gentle embarrassed way, had vaguely described the organics of maturity, and when the time came, after the first hot shame, Olivia had gone happily to her, saying : *Well, it's all over now. Mother, wasn't it awful?* Pleased and then a little proud that she was a woman, she had been dumbfounded when her mother explained, laughing, that it would happen again, every month. — And just as innocent she had been about her father's attitude, until finally there came the humiliation and the anger in realizing that he suspected she was not a virgin. And after that what young man could brave the stern silence of the father immobile in his rocking chair, the hot suppressed resentment of the daughter, guarding herself, speaking with an icy voice of no emotion, no enthusiasm, no enticement ? In such a manner had Amon Hall protected his dignity, his personal pride.

From the carriage block where she sat with icy feet Olivia could see through the open front door a billow of flame where the stairs had been. Down those stairs Mark had walked with his bride, to be married in the music room against a bank of flowers. Olivia had been a bridesmaid ; she remembered the ceremony, walking to a certain marking on the rug and then turning right toward the altar, forlorn in the thought that she would lose his companionship. The music room had always been kept shaded, except when there were formal callers, a strange alien room where as children she and Mark had played breathlessly, crawling behind the furniture in the pretense it was a fearful jungle screened always from the sun. The old-fashioned ebony-black piano with its blue velvet cover fringed with a foreign display of colors — red and yellow, purple and green — was the gleaming hide of a canopied elephant there in their jungle. But on the wedding day the room was filled with sunlight and the what-not in the corner, loaded with cups and saucers and a conk shell with a picture of Galveston painted on the polished pearly surface, was a prosaic object and not a grotesque idol of imagination. The black horsehair furniture, the flowered carpet on the floor, the piano lamp with rose silk shades bought with soap coupons, all

had long since been discarded, but Olivia remembered them clearly, in association with that day more than any other although countless hours had been passed in the music room. There, in white-top shoes with toes turned out, in bright-sashed dress, she had gathered with her girlhood friends to chew sweet gum from Georgia, to sing *Oh dear, what can the matter be?* and *The Frolic of the Frogs*. There she had sat in the tête-à-tête sofa whispering with Ross, and there she had played and sung with Mark's wife later, after the honeymoon, when they had come to live in the yellow house, where Mark again was under his father's eye. And only a year later Olivia had found a direction for herself in Clay, motherless, and she the only woman in the house. In the years that followed she thought of him always as her son, and she tried to be a mother to him, and a father too after Mark died, after the dark night of his death that followed a grim calamitous week. She remembered the excitement when the McCleskey well had come in at Ranger, when other wells were drilled and the hot prairie, made barren by a two year drouth, spouted liquid gold. Rutherford bubbled like a kettle on the fire. The town had called itself the gateway to the oil fields, with an airy dismissal of the fact that the nearest well was a hundred miles away, and Mark Hall had invested his money in a wildcat company. She had gone with him on a visit to Ranger, where a deluge of rain had turned to mud the thick dust of the plains roads, deep-cut by heavy trucks carrying casing and machine parts. There was mud knee-deep in the streets of the town and a man with a sledge and an old gray horse charged ten cents a passenger for ferryage across the street from the station. They stayed in a hotel which was being completed a room at a time, as fast as possible, with each room rented as soon as it had four walls and a door. Every word was golden, and no one spoke of failure. The shadow of oil derricks was across the town, the shadow that fell across Mark's life. Jostled on the boardwalk by men with guns at their hips, by salesmen, hawkers, pedlars, Olivia gasped and listened. She heard no word but oil. At night there was the unearthly light of the gas flares, lasting through until the dawn, and honky-tonk music from a cabaret. . . . A well had caught fire

and burned so brightly you could read a newspaper a mile away by its light, they said. . . . A million dollars had been refused for a cemetery site and the iron bones of pioneers rested undisturbed above a pool of wealth. . . . A stoker on a ship had become a millionaire from his homestead in Texas and telegraphed for two hundred dollars to spend ashore. . . . A man bought a leasehold for ten dollars, or twenty dollars, and sold it for a million, or two million, they said. Little difference a few figures made in computing such wealth. In mid-afternoon, a bright, sunny day, Olivia saw a limousine stop in front of the hotel, a chauffeur in livery at the wheel, and a large-boned woman with face and arms burned red by the sun stepped with an air of daintiness to the mud-spattered boardwalk. She was wearing an evening dress with sequins that sparkled marvelously in the sunlight and her farmer husband, in a tail coat and silk-hatted, with a sheepish air but shoulders pugnaciously squared, was barefooted. . . . Soldiers and sailors, returned from the war, bankers and promoters, thieves and confidence men and murderers walked the streets of the oil towns, alike in corduroy pants and boots, splashing through the mud. And among them Mark Hall moved, translated from his environment, naïve and enthusiastic, bringing to her the tales of millions made in oil, of new wells drilled, of seeing a gusher blown in when a go-devil of nitroglycerin dropped a mile into the pit of the earth. Mark remained at the oil fields when Olivia returned to Rutherford to find Amon with more cases than he could handle, important suits over land titles, involving millions of dollars in oil deep beneath the earth. He was contemptuous of Mark's speculation, and taunted him when he came home again, thin and pale, with his resistance weakened by weeks of worry and disappointment. At three thousand feet gas had come in and the well had been abandoned ; gas which then was considered of no value spewed forth in the still air. Mark returned to Amon's office. It was the peak of the influenza epidemic then and within a few days he became ill and his name was added to the total of victims that filled columns of type in the newspapers. After that Clay had been Olivia's responsibility.

There came a shower of sparks, and Olivia heard a shout from

the crowd which had gathered all around the house. The roof had fallen in and where there had been a tall gable there was now only smoke and sparks and curling, yellow-tipped flames. The roof had fallen in upon the attic where she had played with Clay, where they had lined lead soldiers up in two impressive armies, where she had tried to keep him to herself, away from other boys, where he had first fashioned the childish scrawls that she had called pictures. They too had been in the attic. . . .

"Olivia, you're shivering," Hilda said. "Olivia"

"Yes, what is it ?"

"You're shivering."

"I'm all right, Hilda. I'm warm." Olivia wrapped the kimono more closely about her. "Goodness, I hate to think what Papa will say when he hears about the fire. He was attached to this house, Hilda, we both were. — I can't think what life will be without that house. Everything I like to think of was in there. Hilda, I don't want to go back to that jerry-built bungalow."

"You must, Olivia. You must go to bed."

Olivia stood up then and in a docile manner followed Hilda back through the crowd. Away from the glare of the fire, away from the throbbing motors of the hose carts, away from the noise of the crowd, she became aware of her kimono, murmuring : "Goodness, Hilda, have I been sitting out there all that time like this ?"

In the house, under the electric lights, Hilda looked at Olivia's face, flushed deeply against her white hair. Her lustreless eyes were pale as a noon sky. She did not speak as they went upstairs together, and she settled upon her bed with a long sigh and lay very still. She hardly seemed to breathe as she lay on the white sheet with her eyes closed, and Hilda stood for a time looking at her in silent worry before she went downstairs to the telephone. It took a long time to rouse the operator at Briar Forks, but at length a sleepy voice answered the Rutherford operator. Then, after another wait, Hilda heard Clay's voice : "Hello."

"Clay, this is Hilda."

"What's the matter ?"

"There's been a fire. . . ."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"And Olivia?"

"Yes. It wasn't the bungalow, Clay, it was the big house. It's burned to the ground. Will you tell him?"

"Yes," Clay said, and he heard Amon calling to him from the next room: "What is it, Clay? This is no hour to use the telephone."

"Just a minute," Clay said. "How did it happen, Hilda?"

"I don't know. The whole house was ablaze when it was discovered."

"What's wrong, Clay?" Amon stood in the doorway in his nightshirt.

"There's been a fire, Senator. The house in Rutherford"

"It caught fire?" Amon stepped forward.

"It burned to the ground."

"Good God," Amon said. He sat down suddenly in a chair next the wall. "Good God, what next? — Nothing saved, Clay?"

"Did they save anything, Hilda?"

"I don't think so — not very much anyhow."

"No," Clay said, and Amon's hands gripped his bony knees hard.

"Think of it," he said slowly. "That old house, that fine old house. — It was all destroyed, Clay?"

"That's what she said. — It was insured, wasn't it?"

"Insured?" Amon said. "No, I had no insurance." He got to his feet and walked back into the front room, his white figure a soft blur in the starlight. He sat on the edge of the bed looking out at the prairie, and sitting so, it seemed that all his past life had been wiped away with the old gabled house.

He had slept little and his back ached throbbingly ; his hands were unsteady. He felt old, and very tired, and he looked with unseeing eyes out across the yellow-gray prairie streaked that morning with lavender cloud shadows. He waited with great impatience, turning his head occasionally toward Clay's room, and at length he called querulously : "Clay, ain't you awake yet ?"

"I'm getting up," Clay said.

"I want to go to Rutherford, Clay. Right away. Do you reckon we could borrow Melvin's car and you drive me in ?"

"I'll see," Clay said, and after breakfast he went to find Melvin in the barn.

"She's all right this morning, Clay," Melvin said. "You'd never know it had happened."

"What's that ?"

"Louise. She's all right this morning."

"Oh, that's fine," Clay said. "Good."

Melvin was really pleased to lend the car ; it gave him a proud sense of proprietorship and generosity. He helped Clay push the old roadster into the open and crank it, and Amon walked out to them from the house. He got in with Clay and Melvin opened the gate, and as the old car slued from side to side in the hard ruts of the prairie road the old man gripped the door tightly. But on the highway he relaxed and said sharply after they had driven a few miles : "I don't see why he wanted to buy a new car. This one runs fine."

Clay gave his grandfather a quick sidelong glance and smiled.

"Do you remember when we used to come to the ranch by horse and buggy, Clay ?"

"Surely."

"We'd stop and have a milkshake at that little stand there used to be beside the road half-way out. That was on the old road, of course. Remember that ?"

"Yes," Clay said.

Amon nodded. "You always used to go to sleep in my lap. You were a little boy then, Clay." Amon chuckled, then became silent after a shake of his head. It took over an hour to drive to Rutherford in the old roadster and Amon did not speak

again all the way. But as they turned into the long street leading from the courthouse square Clay heard the old man draw a deep, hissing breath. His hands were clenched together and he stared ahead to where the yellow gables had risen staid and severe above the trees. Soon they saw a faint haze of smoke, and then the scattered black mass of the ruins. Clay turned to the left, toward the row of bungalows, and Amon looked back over his shoulder at the ruins. There was an automobile parked in front of the corner bungalow, and Clay stopped the roadster behind it. And as they went across the lawn toward the porch Hilda opened the front door and stood there waiting for them. Her face was pale and she did not speak until Amon, jerking his head over his shoulder, asked : "Ain't that Dr. Valentine's car ?"

"Yes. — It's Olivia."

"Sick ?"

"Very sick." Hilda's voice was toneless and weary as she looked at the old man. "The doctor's with her now. He's sent for oxygen."

"What's the matter ?" Amon said. "Oxygen ? What happened ?"

"I heard her coughing in the middle of the night and when I went to her room, about dawn, she could hardly breathe. She was suffocating." Amon stood looking at her as if he had not understood her words and she turned her head away. "It's pneumonia, Clay. It happened suddenly in the night, after the fire. Yesterday afternoon she was all right — we sat and talked together for hours. But last night she went out to see the fire. I couldn't make her stay in the house. She got her feet wet"

Amon went past her into the house, fumbling at the door knob. He sat down on the sofa with his head bent, his hat in his hands.

"She wouldn't pay any attention to me, Clay," Hilda said. "I tried to make her stay in bed."

"Why didn't you telephone this morning ?" Amon asked harshly, raising his head. "Why didn't you let us know ?"

He got to his feet. "I don't want anything to happen to Olivia."

"Neither do we, Senator," Hilda said, her face white. "I was upset. I had to get the doctor here. I had to take care of her. I never thought of telephoning until late and when I did Melvin told me you had already started for town."

Amon sat down again.

"I got Dr. Valentine as soon as I could. I woke him out of bed."

"Yes, yes. — All right."

Hilda went out of the room with angry tears in her eyes, and as she tip-toed up the stairs she was trembling. The door of Olivia's room was closed and she went into her own room and sat by the window where she could hear the noise of the street and not the gasps of painful breathing from Olivia's room. She tried to close her eyes, but she could not keep them closed, and she stared at the glaring street and the mist of smoke from the ruins of the gabled house. For hours she had been on her feet and now her nerves were strained ; she was near exhaustion. She could not remain with Amon downstairs because she felt that she would be unable to restrain a burst of temper which would be followed by hysterics.

Later when an ambulance arrived and two white-coated internes carried a tank of oxygen into the house she did not go below stairs. She heard Amon saying : "Take it right on up," and Dr. Valentine came into the hall.

"Hello, Valentine," Amon called out. "Can you come down and speak to me a minute ?"

Hilda waited to show the internes to Olivia's room and the old man and the doctor were just below her in the stair-well.

"Now tell me the facts straight out," Amon said in a quick, nervous voice.

"She's a sick woman, Senator. That's all there is to say."

"Well, is there any danger ?"

"Danger ? Yes, of course. — There'll be a crisis before long, and after that we can tell."

Amon looked steadily at the doctor's expressionless face, then he turned away. He went out upon the piazza, turned and beckoned to Clay.

"Come on, Clay," he said impatiently. "Come on."

"Where to, Senator?"

"We might as well take a look at the house, what's left of it." Amon stepped out into the sun, pulling his hat low over his eyes. Clay walked with him along the block and across the street to the heap of smouldering ruins. Amon stood by the scorched hedge, near the carriage block where the iron Negro boy still held out the rusty hitching ring.

"When this house was first built the ground was as bare as a buzzard's poll," Amon said. "There wasn't a tree, not a blade of grass, just a big yellow house sitting there like a wedding cake. It was the finest house in Rutherford, boy. It had the first stained glass ; it had the first modern plumbing. It was built in 1880 but I tried to keep it up to date. And Olivia did a lot to improve it. She set out that Virginia creeper that covered up the piazza." He chuckled. "I remember once a long time ago she and her mother put little clay brownies on the lawn and they wanted me to buy a cast-iron stag too. — Olivia would be a little ashamed of those brownies now, I reckon, the way styles have changed. But in those days, Clay, the houses were covered with wooden lace and Olivia used to regret that we didn't have that filigree stuff on this house."

Amon walked forward slowly over the parched lawn, which still was wet and sodden from the hose streams. The stone buttresses were scorched black and the steps and porch had burned away, although part of the cornice of the door still stood.

"Your great-grandfather built this house, Clay," Amon said. "He died here, and so did your grandmother, and your father. I thought I would die here too, some day. — When this house was built it was only a few years after Texas could begin to call itself civilized, around here anyway. It was only a few years after thieving Indians had ridden on raids as close to town as Soapstone Creek. That town was five miles out then, Clay, but

now it's a suburb and ten minutes' drive away. — There's been a lot of change since the seventies, Clay, but this old house always seemed to stand against it. It was a background that didn't change ; it always seemed that this old house could bridge any differences the years might bring. A heap of memories burned up with it, my boy."

He walked on around the ruins, stepping over a charred plank. "When I was your age, Clay, I had ambition, maybe more than was good for me, because when you begin to lose that ambition to do things, Clay, somehow there ain't much left to live for. You suffer disillusionment just about proportionate to how aggressive you were. Now I wanted to go to Congress and I went. I wanted to be a Senator and I was elected. Always I was building up something for myself, buying land, building houses, improving my breed of cattle. But there comes a time, Clay, when things like that begin to slip away from you. You don't need any more land, and you don't want any more houses or cattle. And now-a-days it's hard enough to hang onto what you've got. Instead of fighting to get ahead you've got to fight to hang on. Isn't that right ?" He nodded his head vigorously. "Yes, to hang on by your teeth." He looked back at Clay. "I guess we were lucky we had that house rented and moved our clothes out of it, at least."

There was a rusted iron bench on the lawn, set on blocks of cement over by the hedge, and Amon went and sat upon it, looking toward the black charred ruins. "Olivia loved that house," he said slowly. "She hated to rent it out to strangers, Clay, and I didn't want to, either." He glanced at Clay. "Olivia was born there and she never lived anywhere else, except the time she went to Colorado." He was silent for a moment, biting his moustache, moving his shoulders uneasily against the iron back of the bench in a manner that was characteristic of him. Clay had the impression that his grandfather wished to communicate some thought to him and was groping for a means of expression in the shadow of reserve that had always veiled their relationship. "I didn't want to rent that house, Clay, I really

didn't. But I've had to do a lot of things I didn't want to do. It's been necessary, and that house was too big for us. It was a waste. — Maybe I've seemed a little hard sometimes, Clay." He looked sharply up at Clay.

"You young people," Amon said. "You young people never seem to understand the ways of those who went before you. When I was your age, Clay, it seemed that any man could do whatever he wanted for himself if he set his mind to it and worked hard enough. Now I can see it's more difficult. Maybe I've seemed impatient to you. Maybe I haven't understood. — Olivia feels that way. Olivia thinks I've been hard, I know, and I guess you do too, Clay. But, well, I guess you two don't understand, do you? — Do you, Clay?"

"I don't see what you mean, Senator," Clay said.

"Well, just listen to what I'm saying," Amon said explosively. "You can do that, can't you?" He looked at Clay again, a quick, rather sheepish glance in apology for his temper, and bent over to pluck a tall stem of grass. He put it between his teeth, chewing on it from the side of his mouth. "What I mean is, maybe I seem a little strict where you think I oughtn't to be." Amon hesitated. So long had his been an unquestioned power, so long had he exerted the force of his personality upon others, that it was difficult to view himself in any other light. "When the world has always been black and white to you, Clay, it ain't easy to get used to the half-tone," he said slowly. "That's been my problem. — Now you've seen a cloud shadow pass over you on the prairie. You can look overhead and see a white puff of cloud and the sun all around it and you know that in a few seconds the shadow will pass by. But now the whole sky is clouded over, Clay, and there's no telling when there'll be sun again. Well, it's a thunderstorm and a man has to make up his mind to it. You see what I mean? He has to be as stoical as he can and make the best of it, even when this old house burns down, without any insurance. Why, that doesn't even trouble me like it ought to, Clay — I mean the money part. But it's like wiping words off a slate to me, the burning of this house. It's like covering up a picture on the wall, a picture you've looked

at and thought of, a picture of somebody who meant a lot to you, Clay."

"It leaves me with an empty feeling, Senator," Clay said.

"Yes, and Olivia too. It's hard to bear." Amon stood up and looked hard at Clay, frowning as he thought that the impact of his words had made little effect. "You know, boy, what I hate to lose most is that Indian arrow, the one that belonged to old Satotan. You remember it, hanging in a glass case in my study?"

"Yes, of course."

"It was an exhibit at the trial, when I convicted that old scoundrel of murder, Clay, for leading a raid on a wagon train and scalping ten men. That was my first important case, the first chance I had to prove myself. That gave me my start, Clay." Amon began to walk away from the ruins. "And now it's a memory left to only me. Not a man at that trial is alive today, and even the old arrow is burned up. Yes, I hate to lose that more than anything else in the old house."

On the way back to the bungalow Amon straightened his shoulders and said firmly, without looking at Clay: "Those cattle will have to be fed now, Clay, and I want you to see that it's done. I can't trust Melvin to attend to things unless he's watched over."

"All right," Clay said.

"That herd is pretty important to me, I guess you can see that," Amon said. "I reckon you'd better start back for the ranch about noon time." He looked at Clay, then cleared his throat noisily. "No, well, I guess you want to stay around until you know whether Olivia is out of — whether she's all right. — Don't you?"

Clay nodded and they walked on in silence to the bungalow. Hilda met them on the porch, shaking her head when she saw the questioning look in Amon's eyes, saying: "The doctor's still up there, and a nurse. He wants to move her to the hospital if she's strong enough."

"The hospital?" Amon said, then the tense expression of his face relaxed. "Yes, that would be the best place for her. I

have a lot more confidence when somebody's in a hospital."

"There'll be no lunch here, Clay," Hilda said. "You'll have to drive the Senator downtown."

"It's about dinner time now, ain't it?" Amon asked.

"Twelve-thirty."

"We'd better go and eat then." Amon wet his lips and Hilda stood watching him as he went back down the steps.

"Come on, Hilda," Clay said.

"No." She met his eyes. "No, I'll fix myself a sandwich later." She went into the house and Clay followed Amon around the bungalow to the garage.

They drove to the courthouse square and in the Alamo Café Amon ate a good deal, ignoring his diet, and losing his thoughts in the concentration of eating. But Clay sat gazing at the glare of sunlight on the paved square. As strong in Clay as in Amon was the sense of destruction in the burning of the gabled house ; after that there was no immediate reality in Olivia's illness. The swiftness of the crisis had delayed its impact, and Clay could only think of the quick, impersonal tone of Hilda's voice, of her remoteness as she had met them at the door, as she had stood later on the porch when they drove away. He had turned to her for a certain stability, leaning to her as a constant in his life, something to supply the need left by what seemed to be the disintegration of the positives of his environment. Now he was oppressed by a sense of purposelessness ; even the work of the ranch had lost its interest for him, had failed to give direction and aim to his actions. His desire to paint had been sterilized ; he had been made to feel that painting was an auxiliary purpose in life, unrelated to any direct mechanics of existence. Gradually he had been impressed with Amon's distinction between creation and production, which because he was young and because he had never achieved self-sufficiency through his own efforts, he felt unable to contradict. So, revolving within the old man's sphere, he was hesitant to recognize any weakness in Amon, even on his grandfather's admission. And sitting with the old man in the noisy café he could not even be dismayed at the realization of the dependence of his own will. He sat in silence while the

old man ate and later followed him to the car, where Amon said : "We'd better go straight home, Clay."

And that afternoon they sat silently in the parlor of the bungalow, waiting. Occasionally Hilda passed by, but she did not come to talk to them and Clay watched for glimpses of her set face as she went up the stairs. She looked tired and her face was thin ; her gray eyes appeared abnormally large with a strange pale appearance against her black lashes. Once he got up and went to stand in the stair-well and when she came downstairs again he asked : "Have you had any lunch ?"

"No."

"Then come into the kitchen. I'm going to see to it that you eat."

"I'm not hungry, Clay."

He took her hand and drew her toward the kitchen and with a sigh she sat down in a chair while he went to the icebox. He found some cold meat and a head of lettuce and made a sandwich for her. He gave it to her with a show of domination, saying : "Now eat, do you hear ?"

She sat on the chair with her heels on the lowest rung, her knees raised, chewing slowly and occasionally raising her wide gray eyes to him. He brought her a glass of milk.

"This heat has worn us down," he said. "You look tired, Hilda. You need rest."

"No," she said listlessly. "I'm all right."

Clay stood looking at her, searching some way to penetrate her reserve. She seemed to have insulated herself against him. But all he said was : "How is Olivia ?"

"You know as much as I do, Clay. I don't know and I'm very much afraid."

"So am I."

She got to her feet. "You'd better get Ina, Clay, and tell her to market for dinner tonight."

Clay was glad of the opportunity for action. Since the burning of the old house Ina had moved to a shanty she owned down by the flats. Clay drove down the long hill to the flats by the river, which now were dry dust while the river was sand and

rock and moss. Ina's house, which Amon had given to her years before, was on the side of a hill, above the flats, a three-room shack enclosed by a picket fence. When Clay went to the gate a yellow mongrel with watery eyes ran forward from the steps and barked until Ina opened the door and shouted it to silence.

"Clay, is dat you? How is Miss Olivia?"

Clay went through the gate and Ina held the door open for him as she tied on a sunbonnet. To the right of the door old Clemmy was lying on a tumbled pallet, sleeping.

"Clemmy don't feel good," Ina said. "His lil dolly burned up, Clay. It was in de bed where he keeps it and it burned up. He did love his lil dolly somep'n turrible."

"That's a shame. He's always had that doll."

"It ain' only his doll dat's de trouble wif him," Ina said tartly, closing the door. "Dat poor nigger is plain worked out, Clay. Ain't dat de truf? Yesterday in de heat of de sun he was out pushin' de lawnmower all de day."

Clay drove the old Negress to town and waited for her while she marketed. Back at the bungalow about four o'clock he looked in the parlor for Amon, but he was not there. Hilda saw him.

"There's a case he wanted to hear at the courthouse," she said. "He walked down to listen to it. That's typical, isn't it?"

"There's no reason for him to stay here."

"No, I suppose not. I'm glad he's out of the house."

Amon returned in the twilight, walking stiffly homeward with his hands clasped behind his back, and he stood for ten minutes at the corner, looking at the ruins of the old house, before he turned toward the bungalow. Hilda had set a table on the side porch of the house, on the opposite side from Olivia's room, and Clay mixed a cocktail with some of Amon's Bourbon. The old man raised his eyebrows when Hilda took the glass Clay had poured for her. But after a moment he said: "I reckon you need something to strengthen you, young lady. You don't look well. First thing you know you'll come down with something too."

In the heat blood mounted to their faces with the whisky, and

they sat in the still air with their pores dripping perspiration and a warm flushed feeling about their eyes. Hilda had brought buttermilk and crackers for Amon, but again he disregarded his diet and ate cold meat and salad. They sat at the table in the failing light and Hilda lit a cigarette, without defiance, without even a thought of the old man's opinions, and Clay was more surprised than Amon. The old man sat watching the glow of her cigarette in the dark as indifferently as if she had been a stranger.

Later Hilda brought sheets and made up a bed for Amon on a divan in the parlor. To Clay she said : "I suppose you'll have to sleep on the floor. I'll bring you some blankets."

"I won't sleep at all, probably," Clay said, and he went back to the porch and sat in the wicker rocking chair with the bottle of whisky at his elbow. He watched the night deepen and the sub-tropical stars appear and he missed the penetrant smell of the prairie, of cactus and sage and mesquite.

About midnight the light in the hall was turned on. Clay sat up with a start, awakened from a doze. He saw the dark bulk of the doctor's figure against the light, saw the shimmer of Hilda's hair in the yellow glow. He went into the parlor, where Amon was sitting on the side of the divan with his thin shanks gleaming, saying : "Well, Doctor ?"

"Olivia passed away, Senator," Dr. Valentine said. "I did all I could, but her resistance was low. She didn't have the strength to fight."

"Olivia dead," Amon said tonelessly, and Clay stood looking with burning eyes at the doctor's shadowed face. Dr. Valentine rolled down his sleeves and fastened the cuff-links. As he was putting on his coat he noticed Hilda's white face as she stood under the hall light.

"You look as if you needed attention, young lady," he said, putting one hand on her arm. "Did you get any sleep last night ?"

She shook her head.

"I'm going to put you to bed and give you a powder to make you sleep. Come along with me."

Amon looked at Clay. "Think of it," he said. "Olivia dead. It don't seem possible that I should outlive Olivia too."

Clay returned to the porch and poured himself another drink of whisky.

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THE flower borders had shrivelled to dust in the sandy soil of the cemetery and the hothouse flowers for Olivia that had come from far away were pitiful as sacrificial offerings as their sap dried in the hot sun. A grove of cedar trees sheltered the cemetery, and among the twisted, stringy tree-trunks the Hall plot was a bare clearing of sand and red clay in which the tombstones were shiny and naked in the sunlight. There was black marble for Mark Hall and white for Ann, Clay's grandmother. Olivia's stone would be white also, but no flowers would be planted around her grave until rain might fall again in its season.

Fifteen years ago Clay had stood in the cemetery, almost uncomprehending then, when Mark Hall's black marble stone had not yet been set in place, when the open grave had been at his feet. He had stood at Olivia's side then, clinging to her hand, and now the sense of loss was as great as it had been that day when at last he had realized that never again could he turn to his father with his troubles, for advice, for companionship and solace. The cedars in the cemetery seemed smaller now, and the family plot was not green and wood-scented as it then had been. Through the trees the sun shone on a weathered stone, obelisk-shaped, mottled green and yellow by the years, on which the words cut nearly sixty years ago were chipped and worn smooth : *Emma Coleman, murdered by Indians, October 12, 1876 ; If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do ?* She had been Melvin Coleman's grandmother and the town had erected the headstone in those pioneer years after she had been brutally treated by marauding Indians. It seemed incredible that within so short a time conditions had changed so much. The grave was now a shallow depression in the earth and the headstone leaned at an angle among the cedars. The headstone

was a date-mark in Amon Hall's life, and his eyes also turned to its solid shaft as he remembered a sultry afternoon after a rain when he had first arrived in Rutherford from Tennessee. A young boy had galloped into town on a fast bay mare with news of an Indian raid on Soapstone Creek. The town had ridden forth in anger and Amon had stood guard at the log house on the plains that night while Emma Coleman lay close to death with four Kiowa arrows in her and her scalp a trophy swinging from a chief's bridle-rein. Amon drew a deep breath as he listened to the minister's droning voice, so completely did his life seem marked out by the two graves so near together, Emma Coleman's weathered shaft at the beginning and Olivia's white marble headstone soon to be erected at the end.

Hilda stood with a handkerchief pressed to her lips, her head bent, and through her tears she looked at the loose sandy soil at her feet across which large red ants marched in a line to an anthill over by the stone wall of the cemetery. Nowhere did it seem there could be release from the savage brutality of this rugged country ; the burning sun, the flying dust, wailing coyotes on the plains where jackrabbits raced and rattlesnakes coiled their scaly hides ; red ants on the prairie and black ants in the houses ; chigres in the tall grass and yellow jackets threatening from above. Now an army of red ants marched past Olivia's grave, over soil dry as sawdust which would be spaded into it.

Hilda had come to Texas thinking of a country spacious and scenic, green and gay and wild with the shyness of an antelope, not the savage wildness of rattlesnakes and lobo wolves, not brown and hot like a banana left long in the sun. In New Hampshire the summer sun fell on still lakes where there were bass and pickerel and lake trout deep below the surface. Green hayfields were on the hillsides in soft mounds cut from the forests, and water flowed from springs high in the woods. There was a neighborliness which she missed, where everyone knew all about her and her family, knew her faults and accepted them. "On the fourth of July they would gather to eat salmon and green peas out of doors in the tradition of New England, but the fourth of July here in Texas had been spent gasping for air in the sum-

mer drouth, with the thermometer at one hundred and four degrees, with the creeks dried away, the rivers in stagnant pools, with the whole earth cracking open in the heat. But the hardships of the drouth she could endure ; it was the drying up of the wells of her emotion that was unbearable. She could not go on in this automatic, routine life with nothing to give her incentive. Until now Olivia had been there to soothe her, to hear her complaints with unfailing understanding. But now . . . Hilda sobbed as a spadeful of dirt was scattered in the grave. Clay looked at her from across the grave and for an instant she met his troubled eyes. She saw his anxious look and turned her head away. She knew even more clearly than Clay that he would turn to her yearningly now, that he would look to her to supply what Olivia had been in his life, and Olivia had served him as a mother. He would cling to her for what she could give him in the sense of strength, of support and companionship, but would he ever meet her directly and openly, sure of himself ? Would he recognize his own weakness and correct it, or would she continue to serve as the foil of his mood ? Hilda felt then that she was very tired, too tired to be a mother and a wife at once, too tired to battle against him for his own good.

At the close of the service Clay came around and took Hilda's arm and they walked together, behind Amon Hall, toward the rusted iron gate at the entrance to the cemetery. It was not until then that Hilda became fully aware how many people had come to Olivia's funeral. So marked had Olivia's retirement been, so strong the impression of her seclusion, that Hilda was surprised to see so many who had known her well, who stopped Amon Hall to shake his hand and murmur a few words about Olivia. She felt then that there had been too much isolation in the past few months. Living on the ranch her whole world had been the Colemans and the three Halls, with Amon the dominant figure always. Perhaps because of that he had occupied her thoughts so much ; he and not Clay had become the focal center of her life.

They were a long time making their way through the slow-moving crowd to the gate, and in the car, after they had driven slowly away in the tense, static sunlight of mid-morning, Amon

did not speak a word and Hilda too was silent as she sat beside Clay looking out at the glaring street. Away from the cemetery they all breathed easier and Clay drove swiftly around the courthouse and along the broad avenue at the end of which the yellow gabled house had stood for over half a century.

As they walked across the lawn toward the bungalow Amon stopped and turned to face them. There was sweat on his forehead and his lower lip was twisted as he bit at the bristles of his moustache.

"I want to talk to you two," he said abruptly. "We might as well get it over with now." He turned his back and walked on toward the house. Hilda and Clay exchanged glances, Clay pursing his lips in surprise, and they followed the old man into the bungalow. Amon turned on an electric fan and adjusted it so that the air current fell on his face as he sat in an easy chair facing the sofa. He motioned to them to sit down and for a time he looked at them, first at Clay, then at Hilda. At last he said: "Well, we're all that's left of the Halls, Clay." He paused. "Oh, there are some cousins left in Tennessee somewhere." He looked steadily at Clay, his glance seeming to exclude Hilda. "I thought we'd better dispose of Olivia's will right away. Might as well get it over with all at once. — I suppose you know she made it in your favor, Clay."

"Did she?"

"She told me that," Hilda said quietly, and Amon's eyes turned to her briefly, then he held his face for a moment full in the current from the fan and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief.

"Olivia was the kindest person I ever knew," Clay said. "I suppose I knew she would do that."

"Yes, she made it out a few months ago," Amon said. "She'd never made a will up until then and when I drew it up for her I didn't think anything about it. — Of course it's always best to be prepared, to make a will when you're in the best of health, but I expected Olivia to live another twenty years. I certainly didn't think I'd ever outlive her. — I was over thirty years her senior, Clay."

Clay nodded, and Amon turned his face again to the fan for an instant, then abruptly faced Clay, saying : "Well, she didn't leave much. — She inherited a sizable sum from her mother, but there ain't much of it left."

"Oh, I don't care about the money," Clay said sombrely.

"Olivia never knew," Amon said slowly. "She thought she was well-fixed. — I never had the heart to tell her."

"How much is there, Senator?" Clay asked.

"Well, Clay," Amon raised his eyes to the ceiling, his neck against the back of the chair. "There's a couple of thousand dollars in cash money and some worthless securities. That's all."

Clay remained silent but Hilda looked directly at Amon. "Olivia was no spendthrift," she said quietly. "How did it happen, Senator?"

"Bad investments." He returned her glance. "Yes, I made the investments for her, and I put money of my own into the same project. They were building a bridge, Clay, a toll bridge for automobiles that would reduce the automobile trip to a big city by about seventy-five miles. Why, most people would pay a dollar to save seventy-five miles driving around a lake. It seemed to me they would, so I put Olivia's money into those bonds. — And it would have turned out all right, Clay. It would have been a good investment if it weren't for the crooks and thieves in government, if it weren't that that whole state was in the palm of the hand of one man. The company didn't pay graft, it seems, Clay, so the legislature voted to build a free bridge within a quarter of a mile of the toll bridge and to put in a free ferry service in the mean time. I tell you, if they don't force you out of business in one way, they take your money away from you in another. That's the way it is today. — I never had the heart to tell Olivia about it."

"She wouldn't have blamed you for it, Senator," Clay said.

"No, Clay. No, she wouldn't. But I feel sort of responsible and some day I'll make it up to you, boy, since it's your money now."

"I don't mind losing money I never had," Clay said, and Hilda looked at him sharply.

"No, but it's due you, boy. I ought to have been a better custodian, and some day I'm going to make it up to you. I only hope I can." Amon stood up, looking around him at the small parlor, the cheap furniture. "It won't be the same without Olivia. I can't go on living here now. I know she didn't like this house and she hated to live in it. I couldn't go on living here myself. — Clay, I think I'll move out to the ranch with you-all for a while, if that's all right."

"Of course," Clay said.

"I'll move out yonder and see the summer through," Amon said. "Clay, between us we'll work things out and make that ranch pay, won't we, boy? — Yes, we'll pull through all right." He straightened his shoulders and moved slowly to the door, but turned back at the stairs in the hall. "I'm going to make my things ready now, Clay, and we can start out today for the ranch. Does that suit you all right?"

"I'm ready," Clay said.

"All right, then." Amon went up the stairs, and they heard his shoes creaking after he had gone from sight.

"Well, that was rather a shock," Hilda said.

"I hadn't really expected anything, so I'm not disappointed. — Are you?"

"Yes. I had hoped there would be enough to make us independent, Clay. — But I suppose no amount of money would do that for you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Don't let's fight. I don't mean anything. — At least, Clay, there's two thousand dollars. That will take us to New York."

"Sure."

"How soon will you get it — the money?"

"In a few days. The will has to be filed for probate. It won't be long."

"And then we'll go, Clay. Then we'll go away from Texas for good. — Only another week of it!"

"What's all this?" Clay raised his eyebrows. "We couldn't leave before late in the fall at the earliest."

"Why not? Of course we can."

"I'll go later, as soon as the drouth is over. But he needs me down here now, Hilda."

"Clay, we're going right away," she said tensely. "I mean it. We've got to, for both our sakes. — I'd go berserk here, and I want you away where you can be a human being again."

"I'm sorry about that." He looked down at his hands, gripped in his lap. "I've been difficult, I know, and I'm sorry, Hilda. Matters haven't turned out much as we hoped, have they?"

"No, it's been pretty awful, and if we stay here, Clay, it will be worse. I'm sure of that."

"When the drouth is over . . ."

"That would be too late."

"But I promised the Senator I'd help him, Hilda. I must stay here until the herd is disposed of. I owe him that."

"You don't owe him anything, Clay," Hilda said in a tight, nervous voice. "Not even loyalty."

Clay turned to her with his mouth half-opened to speak, but looked away when he saw the expression of her eyes. Just then they heard Amon's squeaking shoes on the stairs and he came into the parlor, carrying a suitcase.

"I haven't packed a bag in fifteen years," he said slowly. "Olivia always attended to that. I never noticed until too late how many things she did do for me. That's the way it is. — Hilda, are you ready to go?"

"I have to get my bag."

"Hurry, then."

Amon got in the front seat with Clay and when Hilda came downstairs she locked the house and got in the back without a word. On the drive to the ranch she took out a cigarette and lit it and with a stimulating sensation of release she sat and blew puffs of smoke at the back of Amon's neck. But he did not once turn his head and paid no attention to the thin trail of smoke that blew past his face.

Hilda got out to open the red gate at the entrance to the ranch and under Amon's constant urging Clay drove the car on to the ranch yard, leaving Hilda to walk. When she reached them

Amon was standing with his feet wide apart, his hands on his hips, looking at the windmill, saying : "Is that fellow still here ?"

Hilda saw Upton sitting by the windmill, beneath the tank, whittling on a stick of soft yellow pine. Amon called out : "Ain't you started for East Texas yet ?"

"Fixin' to, Senator," Upton said. "Lettin' the team rest up some."

"Now by God," Amon said suddenly, and seeing Melvin coming out to the log house he called to him : "Melvin !"

"Yes, Senator. Howdy."

"Melvin, has that fellow been feeding my hay to his stock ?"

"Well, just a couple of bales, Senator."

"I knew it," Amon said. "By God, I knew it. — Melvin, we need that hay, don't you know that ?"

"I thought we could spare a couple of bales, though."

Hilda turned abruptly away and went into the house. After a moment Clay followed her. She was sitting on the edge of the piazza in the shade. She looked up at him : "It begins again. Good Lord, two bales of hay ! — Clay, how much money was invested in those bridge bonds ?"

"I don't know exactly."

"But several thousand dollars ?"

"Oh, yes. Sure."

"He can lose thousands of dollars of your money, but he's ready to scalp Melvin for giving away two bales of hay."

"Yes, that's his way. He didn't used to be so strict about it. But as he would say, it's his hay, not Melvin's."

"Jesus," Hilda said. "Don't defend him, Clay."

"I'm not defending him. — Just explaining him, Hilda."

"Then don't explain him."

"Oh, now." Clay smiled. "You're in a difficult mood today."

"It isn't a mood, Clay. It's just I, Hilda James Hall. That's the way I am. That's the way I feel about it. — Clay, you ought to see by this time that I'm entirely serious. I said that we had to go away from Texas and I meant it. And I mean now, right away. And whatever happens, Clay, I *am* going."

"*You* are? You mean without me?"

"Yes, unless you come now."

"But I can't, Hilda. You know that. I've got to stay here, at least until the fall. — Listen, the worst of it is over. Summer is nearly past and the heat will let up. Let's forget all the difficulties we've had. We can begin again on a new page, Hilda."

"Not now, Clay. It's too late."

"I see. You mean you're not in love with me any more."

"No, that isn't what I mean." She glanced at him briefly. "But, Clay, it's hopeless if we go on like this. If we're going to have any self-respect left . . ." Her voice died away and she sighed.

"Then what do you want?" he asked in a cold, hard tone.

"I want to go away. If I have to go alone, all right."

"I can't go now."

"You mean you won't go. — Then I do go alone. But I'll have to ask you for train fare, Clay."

"Hilda, we're not strangers. Don't act like that. You can have the money Olivia left."

"I don't need all that."

"I think Olivia would want you to have it," Clay said slowly. "I'll get it for you as quickly as I can."

"I won't take more than the railroad fare," Hilda said. "And maybe a little to last me until I get a job."

"Can you get a job, do you think?"

"Of course I can."

"We'll split that money in half," Clay said. "I won't keep more than half of it."

"All right." She looked around at him, but he was staring out across the prairie, his eyes squinted against the glare, his lips pressed together. Hilda got up and went into the house.

At supper that evening Amon noticed the silence between them. He glanced frequently at Hilda and finally he asked: "What secret have you two got?"

Hilda looked at Clay and he said slowly, drawing the prongs of his fork along the table-cloth: "Hilda is going away for a while."

"Going away? Where to?"

"New York," Clay said.

Amon straightened against the chair-back. "New York? What put that idea into your head?"

"I'm going to find work there," Hilda said. "I'm going to live there. I'm not coming back to Texas, Senator."

"You're not? Why . . ." He sensed the defiance in her tone and after a pause said quietly: "What sort of work could you do?"

"Model clothes — a mannequin."

"You mean walk around in clothes for people to look at?"

"Yes."

"Like a heifer at the fat stock show — just walk around for people to see you?" Amon frowned. "That's no kind of work for a married woman to do." He looked at Clay. "Clay, you oughtn't to let her do that."

Clay only smiled, and after a moment Amon pushed his chair back and left the table.

"He's shocked," Hilda said, and suddenly she threw her head back and laughed, almost hysterically, until tears came into her eyes.

In a melancholy mood Clay went to the saddle-house where his sketch-box and canvases were beneath a towsack in the corner. He stretched a canvas, and the tapping of the hammer started hens clucking in the barn, caused a strutting rooster to flap its wings and shake its red comb and walk out into the sunlight like a saddlesore cowboy. Clay set up the easel in the barn doorway and painted the same scene he had sketched the afternoon when Hilda had sat on the hay behind him, watching. But now there was no dust. The air was clear and still and the wagon-sheet among the pecan trees was a glaring white against the logs and rock chimney of the old house. Clay daubed paint on his palette; there was still turpentine in the mixing can. He began to paint, with relief, losing himself and his thoughts in the concentration of working. He painted the windmill against the almost white sky. He painted the red water tank in stark clear outline above the haze of heat that made diffuse the foreground

of burned dry grass and bare ground deeply cracked. And his painting again was literal, almost academic, as unconsciously he discarded the results of his months of experimentation. The painting was symbolic of how he had closed within himself, how he had returned to his environment, casting off all alien things.

XVII

THE next day three hens dropped dead, fell from their roosts in a bundle of feathers. There was no thermometer on the ranch to tell how hot it was, but Hilda knew it was the most intense heat she had ever experienced. She lay nearly nude on a cot in a shaded room, fanning her face, breathing shallowly of still hot air that seemed to clog her lungs. And that morning the gaso-line pump broke down. Always, day and night, they had heard the gasping of the engine out on the prairie, and it was Amon Hall who noticed the absence of the sound that day. He called to Clay : "I don't hear that pump, boy. Do you reckon it's failed us ?"

"I hope not."

"You'd better go out and look at it, Clay."

So Clay went to the log house to call Melvin, and together they drove the horses up and hitched the team to the wagon. Just as they were starting out Amon came from the ranch-house and climbed up beside Clay. "I see the herd yonder by the water tank," he said. "I want to look them over."

After they had gone a hundred yards along the lane the horses began to sweat ; they were dripping wet at the pasture gate. As they drove across the plains Amon stared at the steers through glasses misty with sweat. Sweat dripped down his long nose, flushing his neck where a handkerchief was tied for absorption. "They're losing weight fast," he said, little louder than a whisper. "It's like a fever wasting them away. — And the feed is about used up, ain't it ?"

"I'm feared it is, Senator," Melvin said, as he climbed down from the wagon. "There's some left, and a few bags of cotton-seed cake from last year."

"We have to make it do," Amon said. "We have to. But those steers need plenty feed too."

Melvin stood with his hands on his hips looking at the gasoline engine. "I don't know why he went and bought a second-hand pump," he said in a peevish undertone to Clay. "You can't depend on it." He knelt on the grease-stained platform on which the engine was mounted and Clay climbed the windmill tower to unfasten the baling wire with which the fans had been made fast. He sat on the edge of the platform atop the tower, looking out at the plains. Examining the prairie he saw that there was hardly any grass ; what remained was like dry chaff scattered on the ground by the wind. And everywhere there was dust, white on the trees of the creek bottoms, cream and olive on the hills. The hills looked as if they had been outlined by a sure hand in burnt umber against the pale sky.

When Clay climbed down from the tower Melvin had lit a cigarette and was seated on an empty gasoline drum, wiping his throat with a bandana handkerchief and saying to Amon in a stubborn, nervous voice : "I can't fix that there engine."

"What's the matter with it ? Why not ? It must be something simple. That's a good pump. It was in good condition."

"I tell you I don't know what ails it," Melvin said. "It looks like it's about ready to fall apart. — Clay, do you know anything about engines ?"

"No." Clay walked over to the tank. It was only half-full of water. There was little wind, and although the windmill creaked occasionally the fans did not turn.

"You'll have to git a mechanic to go over it, Senator," Melvin said. "I done the best I could."

"I'll call up the garage in Briar Forks when we get back to the house," Clay said.

"It seems like Melvin ought to be able to do the job. I . . . Well, all right, Clay, call them up." Amon turned toward the wagon, mumbling : "Why, that's liable to be a two or three dollar job."

Melvin grinned at Clay and they drove back to the ranch-house in silence. Clay went to the telephone and Amon mut-

tered : "Another straw to break the camel's back," and stamped out to the piazza. Hilda was still lying on the cot in her room. The last few days had turned her nerves to steel wires, taut to the snapping point, and at luncheon she was silent, avoiding the sharp glances of the old man, avoiding Clay's eyes. She had prepared only a salad, with buttermilk, and Amon did not speak at all until he had finished eating. Then he said abruptly, as if he had been brooding, in a sudden burst of temper : "Why don't that fellow Upton start out for East Texas ? I'm going to see to it that he moves on. I'll go down and speak to him this afternoon. — Clay, did you know that Melvin has been letting him have milk and eggs ?"

Clay shrugged his shoulders and would not look at Hilda.

"And hay, too," Amon said. "Damn it, that fellow has to clear out."

"We have plenty of milk and eggs," Clay said.

"I don't like a fellow like that to take advantage of me," Amon said sharply. "He settles here without so much as a by your leave. He makes camp and eats my milk and eggs and gives my hay to his stock like it was his."

"He lost everything he had in the drouth, Senator," Clay said. "He hasn't got a thing to his name but a wagon and team and an old dry cow."

"I know all that — but I don't want him taking advantage of me." He looked at Clay's flushed, averted face. "I don't want to be small about it, Clay, but I tell you I need everything I've got now. I need everything for myself."

"I see you do," Clay said quietly, and got up to clear the dishes from the table. Just then the mechanic drove up in his car, a home-made seat perched on an old chassis. He was at the water tank for an hour that afternoon and when he returned with sweat standing in round drops on the grease stains on his hands and face Amon met him at the door.

"You ain't got much to work on yonder," the mechanic said. "I'm amazed it run as long as it did. You'll have to buy yourself a new part. I reckon Rutherford is the closest you can git it."

"Yes, all right," Amon said crisply. "Write out what's

needed." He turned away with a cold, unreasoning anger and went to his rocking chair on the piazza. Clay followed him, and the old man turned his head when Clay opened the door, then looked again at the pale brown prairie. "I might have known something like this would happen," he said. "Clay, I'm about ready to give up. I tell you, it ain't worth the powder." He sat for a long time without speaking, with his chin on his chest, and Clay thought he was asleep. But as he was tip-toeing to the door Amon raised his head with a jerk: "Clay."

"Yes."

"I want you to go to town and buy that part for the pump."

"All right."

"This afternoon. As soon as the air cools."

Clay went on into the house, and saw Hilda standing at the door to the kitchen. "When you go, Clay, will you do something for me in Rutherford?"

"Sure."

"See about my train reservations."

He bit his lips. "Why don't you stay here, Hilda? See here, this is absurd."

She shook her head. "It's too late, Clay. We've gone over all that. Why don't you come with me?"

"But in just a month or two I'll be able to leave. Can't you wait until then?"

"I doubt if you'll ever be ready to leave, Clay. — And if I don't go now we'll both stay here indefinitely. I'm convinced of it. And I'm not going to live that way." He walked past her into the kitchen. "Don't be sulky about it, Clay. — Secretly, don't you know I'm doing the right thing?"

"No."

"Anyway, you wouldn't admit it. But think back, Clay. Think how happy we were in France, and look at us now, practically hating each other. It isn't just dust and sun that's done it. Clay, I could endure dust and sun like this every day of my life if only I thought it were worth while." She lit a cigarette in a fumbling manner, holding it in her lips as if it were

the first she had ever smoked. "In Paris, Clay, you were leading a free life, without any worries. It was artificial, you said so yourself." Clay frowned, thinking that women treasured every casual remark to quote against a man, with a relentless remembrance of details. "And then you came home to face reality," Hilda said. "Only we didn't face reality, either of us. We looked around for the path of least resistance, and it was Texas. Clay, we missed our opportunity to work out our lives for ourselves, together."

"You wanted to come to Texas. Be honest about it." He looked at her steadily. "Hilda, women are always trying to find an ideal in their relations with men. It's like driving a mule. You beat him with a whip, you swear at him and light a fire under him. You torture and goad him to make him run like a Kentucky thoroughbred. But if he's a mule you can't do anything about it."

She threw her cigarette into the fireplace after taking only a few puffs. "That's a homely rationalization, Clay, but it's not true about us. Some girls would have endured it. A dumb, bovine thick-skinned girl would have made you a docile wife. She would have accepted everything without question. She would have endured the Senator and she would never even have noticed the change in you while she was adapting herself. She wouldn't have known what there was in you worth preserving. — Clay, you made an unlucky choice of a wife."

Clay walked over and stepped on the cigarette she had thrown away, grinding out the fire with his heel.

"When are you going to town, Clay?"

"Right away."

"And will you make reservations for me — say for Friday?"

"Yes," he said curtly, and walked out of the kitchen, out to the garage in the hot sun with blood pounding his temples. He was too angry to argue with her, feeling she had taken advantage of him in his tense unhappiness so soon after Olivia's death. He wrenched the car around the turns in the road and it was an added, spiteful irritation when suddenly dust again blew in from the west, beginning not in a pink haze this time, but coming

in a sudden dense cloud that whistled with the strength of the north wind down upon the ranch. The sun was nearly obscured by it and the slanting particles of dust struck the car like hail lashed by a winter wind. He was a mile down the road when the dust storm struck. A great shadow swept across the prairie ahead of him and he turned his head and saw the opaque cloud sweeping toward him. He drove to the side of the road to close the windows, but a choking swirl of dust burst around the car before he had finished. He coughed until his lungs ached, spitting dry dust into his handkerchief. A hundred yards ahead was as far as he could see the fence posts, but he drove as fast as he could on the slippery plains road between strands of barbed wire that reflected an eerie radiance in the haze of dust. When he reached Rutherford he drove the car screaming up the hill in second gear and did not think to shift to high speed until he had reached the town square. In the farm implement store they told him they would have to send to Dallas for the needed part, a two-day delay, and he smiled grimly when he visualized Amon's anger. He went back to the car to drive to the station, but with his foot on the running board he hesitated. It was too much to ask him to arrange for her tickets ; he would not do it docilely like an errand boy. A reaction from the passive state into which he had developed set in and he became angry. He thought that he should never have allowed her to talk, to establish her position so firmly in her mind by doing so. Their problem should have been solved emotionally, not by a tense, reserved discussion of it. Weeks ago he should have swept away the barrier between them only on the basis of sex, he thought. That was the way to handle a woman. He remembered now innumerable occasions when he had avoided any mutual attempt to analyze their difficulties, and because of this had avoided Hilda. The perverse antagonism had developed so imperceptibly, but so progressively, that very suddenly he had realized that they were no longer able to talk frankly with each other. He knew that the ranch, even in the drouth, in the heat and the dust, had been tolerable to him because with Hilda there he thought of no other life. Even when they quarrelled he was able to go

away and calm himself, knowing that on his return she would be there and always there was the course of reconciliation to be taken when the fever of their misunderstanding had burned away. Always he had felt that they were so close together that no quarrel could disrupt the essential unity. He understood that he had failed to communicate the depth of this feeling to her ; he felt that he had completely failed her, but he did not like to think of it. Instead he sought to balance off his own blame with the list of the grievances she had caused him. He thought of her as willful and impulsive, lacking in sympathy. He remembered her criticisms and the trivial things which were universally feminine but which became personal to her in his thoughts. The first night in his grandfather's house she had been caustic, immediately upon her arrival — but was that the defense of her own shyness in unfamiliar surroundings, or because of her recent illness ? The first day at the ranch had begun the sharp progression of her criticism. Everything she had seen passed in probation before her eyes, it seemed, until he had been hesitant to offer for her appraisal what had been important in his life, conditions that had always been. But in France, in an environment new to him, he remembered that he had been quick to analyze, to appraise and criticize. Then he had not been personally involved. Now life seemed to him unbearably chaotic. There was no pattern to be followed ; no recognized pattern in the past. Now any effort, any purpose seemed defeatist. There was no direction to follow and nothing to which he could turn back. In retrospect he tried to imagine some element of form in his life, some definite design, but he could not. The thought came to him that his influence on other people had been unhappy. It almost seemed that there was some force in him, malevolent, destructive, with the cancerous spreading of decay. He employed this conceit to divert his thoughts from the reality of his situation. He remembered Arlette Fabre, how a casual Paris escapade had led to a relationship in which he had been too thoughtless to deny the implication of permanence. He remembered her clinging to him, feverishly striving for a hold upon him in a courtship of such

patent ingenuity, and he remembered her that last time, in Montparnasse, with a sailor, spitting at him the acid of her soul. He had been the agent of transition for her. And Paul Barthelot he had led into a net of police surveillance he would never escape, had forced him into an organization of fascists, to march with it in the Place de la Concorde, to see his own brother shot down. And certainly he had failed in the promise he must have had for Hilda, alone and helpless, to whom he had diffidently given aid and friendship. In the lives of all these people Clay had drawn the line of demarkation ; his had been the passive hand that drew it, the passive hand guided by a force inevitable as fate — disintegration and decay.

Clay turned on his heel toward a drug store. He bought a newspaper at a stand outside and read that there had been rain in Oklahoma and Kansas, none in Texas. He looked up at the sky which was rosy with the waning dust storm. "That's a breath of hope," he said, and suddenly he felt better. He went inside the drug store and took off his hat, wiping his face with his sleeve. To the clerk he said : "I want a quart of whisky."

"We still got prohibition here, Mr. Hall," the clerk said with a smile, and Clay was surprised to be known by name. He said hoarsely : "You can sell me a quart though."

"Well, O.K., I'll do it," the clerk said, and returning with a package he had wrapped under the counter, smiled at Clay. "I don't know, maybe Texas will stay dry. What do you think ? This county was the first to adopt prohibition, way to hell and gone ago."

"Yes," Clay said, taking the bottle.

"It was Senator Hall put prohibition over down here in the first place, I heard tell," the clerk said. "Local option vote."

"That's right," Clay said, and walked back to the car with the bottle under his arm. He drove toward the highway and a mile outside of town stopped in the scanty shade of a dust-whitened tree. He unwrapped the bottle and unscrewed the cap. Amon had often told him of the campaign for temperance in Paladora County, years ago in the days of his youth. Thinking of it

Clay laughed shortly and raised the bottle for a long drink. That has been the trouble, he thought suddenly. I haven't relaxed enough. I've been too nervous, too taut. I needed a good bender to loosen me up. He took another drink. Why didn't I think of it before? We should have gotten drunk together, like we used to. That would have washed away these petty little differences. He nodded his head sagely, squinting at the amount of whisky in the bottle. He took another drink, then corked the bottle and drove on. In the direction of Briar Forks dust still hung in a dark shadow over the land. Clay stopped the car on a hill to look at it and at the lambent yellow border above, where the sun shone through a thinner fringe of the cloud. He felt that without the drouth, without the dust storms, there would have been no emotional disbalance between them and he swore viciously, cursing the cloud of dust in a burst of obscenity that mixed French and English words. Sweat beaded on his temples and his face itched with it. His whole skin itched, warmed by the whisky. He took another drink and reflectively corked the bottle as the liquor trickled in slow hot drops down his throat. Swearing at a cloud of dust drifting on a strong wind over the prairie was again evading the issue, he realized, was again to postpone probing of the truth, as he had so often done. He pushed the gear shift with his heel and started down the hill. The bottle was in his lap, and once on the drive to the ranch, after he had passed through Briar Forks and was following the narrow lane of the prairie road, he lifted it up and drank while driving. Dust still rattled against the windows, but the pall had lifted higher and he could see a mile ahead on the road. He could see the long ghostly shapes of the distant hills through the dust, and cattle on the plain, cactus on the slopes.

Melvin was in the yard and Clay stopped the car and beckoned to him. Melvin stepped on the running board. "Want a drink, Melvin?"

"What's that? Whisky? Where'd you git it? — Well, I'd shore like some, Clay. But not now, I reckon. Not while the Senator's out here."

Clay drove on toward the house, grinning as he thought that Melvin had probably never taken a drink in his life, and as he stopped the car Amon came out on the porch, calling : "Did you get that part, Clay ?"

"No," Clay said. "They have to send to Dallas for it."

"Send to Dallas ? Why, we've got to have it right away. Did you tell them that, Clay ?"

"Yes." Clay got out of the car, the bottle in his hands. "It'll take a couple of days, Senator," he said, and went past the old man into the house, into the kitchen where Hilda was seated at the table, peeling potatoes. Amon followed him and sat down by the stove, watching Clay pour whisky into a glass and mix water with it.

"Did you make the reservations, Clay ?" Hilda asked quietly, without looking up.

"Reservations ?" Amon said. "What's this ?"

"My train tickets," Hilda said. "I'm leaving Friday."

"So soon ?" Amon gave her a long sly glance, then his chuckle rose deeply, spasmodic. "I never did think you'd stick it out on the ranch. Not from the minute I saw you."

"Who can blame her ?" Clay said, turning to the old man.

"Eh ? What's that ?"

"I said who can blame her ? She's young. She has a right to hope to do something for herself, to make herself happy."

"Oh, certainly, certainly."

"And small chance there is of that with you sniping at her, or with me growling around the house," Clay said. Hilda looked up quickly and Clay said : "She's got guts enough to stand the drouth and the heat. It's *us* that's driving her away."

"Driving her away ?" Amon cried. "What nonsense. — Clay, how much of that have you drunk ?"

"I'm not drunk. — Senator, I've stood it as long as I intend to myself. I'm washed up, you hear ?"

"You've had enough." Amon stood up, with a strange gray look on his face. "Put that bottle away, Clay. Don't disgrace yourself." He stalked from the kitchen and Clay turned to

Hilda, swaying a little. He cleared his throat, said gruffly : "Come here."

"What do you want ?"

"I said come here."

She got slowly to her feet and crossed over toward him. With sudden exultation he caught her wrist ; he felt masterful, primitive. He dragged her toward him and nearly lost his balance. His arms were around her and he bent his head to her throat. At first he did not notice that she was rigid in his arms, but then her hands pushed against his chest. "Stop it, Clay." Her toe struck his shin hard and she twisted away from him, her face flushed and her yellow hair dishevelled. "You're drunk."

"Oh, all right," Clay said, staring at her. "I'm drunk." He put his hand on the sink for support. "What's so God damned disgusting about that ? Yes, I'm drunk."

"Clay, did you make those reservations ?" Her face was an angry pink and her eyes were so bright that he turned his glance away.

"No, I forgot."

"You forgot !"

"Well, I didn't do it, anyhow. I was dumb enough to think I could persuade you to change your mind," he said hoarsely. "Or maybe I'd go with you. I don't know. I guess I'm drunk." He picked up the bottle and went out of doors without looking at her again. Melvin had gone to the barn, where he was pitching feed into a wagon, and Blossom was standing in the doorway of the log house. Clay walked past her with the bottle in his hand, past the windmill, and took a path that led down to the creek, to low land where the pecan trees grew widely spaced as if planted so. The wagon-sheet of the Upton wagon shone white in vagrant sunlight and he saw Upton sitting on a round stone on the bank of the dry creek, where branches which had once been under water were bent to bows by the course of the creek and were hung with dried leaves like pennants of despair.

"Get a glass," Clay said, and sat down on a thick root.

"Shore will." Upton went to the wagon and brought two glasses from the wagonbed. He held them out and Clay poured whisky in each.

"Well, now," Upton said. "This is real nice. Well, now."

"Got to have somebody to drink with," Clay said.

"Glad to do it. Glad you come along." Upton's yellow teeth showed in a grin. He waved the glass toward Clay, then drank the whisky down. Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he winked at Clay. "First I had of any of that since I can remember. It shore does wash the dust away, don't it?"

"Have a little more dust cleanser."

"Dust cleanser? Ha-ha. Yes. Shore will."

Clay's unsteady hand sloshed whisky into the glass.

"Last time I was drinking whisky was two years back, mighty near," Upton said. "It was a mummy whale and an eight foot cow got me started. What do you think of that? A mummy whale and an eight foot cow. Biggest cow I ever seen. Biggest in the world, they said it was. I reckon so, too. I never seen one to beat it anyhow. There was a man jumped a hundred foot into a wash tub, too."

Clay looked up from his glass. "Carnival?"

"That's right. Carnival. County fair. No other way to see a mummy whale slap-dash in the middle of the prairie that I know of. Stunk a little, it did. Say, what do they presarve them things with?"

"I don't know. Alcohol, maybe."

"Take a powerful lot of alcohol. Waste, ain't it?"

"Where's your glass?" Clay held up the bottle.

"Right here handy, and empty too. Good whisky, ain't it? Better'n the last time. It was lookin' at the fishy eye of that rhummy whale got me started. Corn likker. And then I seen that eight foot cow. Wouldn't believe it, I can tell you. Had to go back again the next day to take another look at it, I did, and had to finish up that jug, I did." Upton laughed and spat into the sand of the creek-bed. "It was eight foot tall, all right, and fixin' to calve. Never seen the critter that come

out. Like t' of though, and the bull which served it too. — Got any more of that you can spare?"

"Plenty." Clay gave him the bottle.

"Don't want to miss a chance like this here. Take a long time to wash that dust out of my throat, I can tell you. — Now you take this stuff we seen today. That ain't dust. Man, you never seen dust if you call that daisy pollen floatin' around up yonder dust. Why, I seen it so black it was midnight at high noon, like black soot blowin' out of an old cook-stove. Couldn't see the end of your pipe with it a-burnin'. Believe that?"

"Sure."

"It's true. Y'ought to. It's true as hell. But I wouldn't believe that eight foot cow till I seen it. A whale, sure. Why not? I heard tell of whales before. But I never seen an eight foot cow and I seen plenty cows. Weighed more than three thousand pounds, it did. Reckon it could give enough milk to float that there whale. Like to of seen the critter it birthed." Upton grinned. "Don't expect people to believe me when I tell 'em I seen dust flying thick as oil smoke and ten times as heavy, any more than I believed that eight foot cow until I seen it." He leaned over and poured more whisky in both their glasses.

Clay, sitting on the root of the tree, leaned back against the trunk, his head hot with the whisky, his whole body wet with perspiration.

"I got some tales to tell," Upton said, "when I git to East Texas."

"When are you going to East Texas?"

"Don't know." He looked at Clay and winked. "Don't know as I'll go even. Fact is, don't know what in hell I *am* goin' to do. Thought I'd camp here and figure things out some." He raised his glass and took two huge swallows. "I got kin in East Texas, but Christ knows they ain't no more anxious to lay eyes on me than I am on them. Sort of a place to be headin' fer, though. Gives you an aim when folks ask where you're bound. Don't know as I'll ever git any nearer

East Texas than I am today. — Now if I had a little money I'd buy me an auto and head out California way. . . .

“What's out yonder ?”

“I don't know. Pick cotton. Pick apples — maybe fish. Hell, I don't know. Just an idea I had. Ain't thought much about it, though.” He held the bottle up to the sun and squinted at it. “Couple more there. Reckon I drunk too much of it.”

“No, go ahead.”

“Well, if you say so. Obliged to you.” He drank from the bottle, and wiped the neck of it on his shirtfront. “Too bad they ain't no country where there's plenty game and sweet water to camp by. A man could live in the woods if only he could lay his eyes on any woods. — Best place is the city, I reckon, but I'd hate to have to live there permanent. Can get food free, they say, and I reckon it's due me. I paid enough taxes in my time, and I got nothing from the government but seed catalogues, so to speak.”

The sun had set behind the hills and the wagon-sheet was a brilliant amber glow. They both sat in silence looking at the western sky above the bare bluff, and then on the bluff Clay saw the living yellow of Hilda's jacket, the flash of the brass buttons. She took the path down through the trees and walked slowly toward them. Near at hand she smiled. She dropped to her knees beside him and her hand touched his arm. She said quietly : “Clay, I want a drink too.”

They met each other's eyes. “There's just about one drink left.” He picked up the bottle and gave her his glass. She was sitting on the root beside him now and for an instant he held the bottle poised above the glass, then lowered it slowly and leaned it against the tree-trunk. His arm swept around her and he kissed her roughly, saying : “God damn it, do I have to be drunk to tell you I love you ?”

Upton cleared his throat noisily, then got up and walked away toward the wagon beside which Mrs. Upton was building a fire in a camp stove.

"Clay, what did you mean when you said you might go with me?"

"Oh, so you're going to seize on that?" She drew away from him, but his arm tightened around her. "We're a couple of damned fools, operating at cross purposes. Let's be human." He raised her chin with his hand and kissed her. They clutched each other tightly. Their bodies strained together and Hilda, gasping, said: "Clay, we mustn't ever grow apart."

"No, never again," he whispered. Their faces were wet and their cheeks caressed. "We must grow together," Hilda said. "We're young. I couldn't bear it if one of us turned in one direction and the other just the opposite."

"We'll go hand in hand," Clay said.

Hilda drew her head back. "Clay, we *do* have to settle this now. — I mean what we're going to do."

"All right, we'll settle it. But wait a minute, Hilda. I couldn't walk out on him now, when he's alone — so soon after Olivia, too. Don't you see that? Listen, that old man is eighty-five years old. Later I'll go. I mean it. As soon as the drouth is over. I'll go anywhere you want, if that's going to make you happy."

She shook her head slightly. "We have our own lives to think of, Clay. But if I can be sure, if we wait a little longer, another month, if I know for sure you'll go then . . ."

"Oh, that's definite. I've made up my mind."

"Well, never mind the tickets then." She smiled. "Say, aren't you going to pour that drink you promised me?"

Later when they climbed the bluff to the ranch-house it was nearly dark. Hilda was thinking of how she had always managed to influence Clay, had won her points by forcing his hand, by the withdrawal in a threatened independence, and in a moment of illumination she said: "Clay, there's one thing I'm afraid of — when you don't need me any more, are you going to hate me?"

"What a strange thing to say." He stopped short, peering at her in the darkness.

"Is it? Well, forget I said it. I didn't mean anything."

She walked on, and when he followed she took his hand silently. They went hand in hand toward the piazza where Amon was sitting. Climbing the steps Clay remembered the newspaper he had bought in Rutherford.

"There's been rain in Oklahoma, Senator," he said quietly.

"Small good rain will do now, Clay," Amon said.

"It will put water in the creek again."

"So they've had rain, have they?" The old man grunted.

"Well, you might know it wouldn't fall here."

"There's a precedent for rain now, anyhow," Clay said, with a wry smile in the darkness.

"Clay, rain even now is too late to do the winter grass much good. There won't be enough forage for a goat this winter, I tell you." Amon sighed. His body was a vague white blur as he sat in the rocking chair on the piazza in the quick-night after dusk, and his voice seemed to lack substance, as his figure was shadowy in the night. "Sit down, Clay, I want to talk to you," he said. "Sit down, young lady." They came to the edge of the piazza and Clay sat at his grandfather's feet, with his knees drawn up within his clasped hands and his back resting against a pillar. After a time Amon said slowly: "Clay, I want to ask your advice."

Clay was astonished. He looked up, trying to see the old man's face. "That is, if you're sober," Amon said tartly. "If you haven't drunk too much of that whisky."

"I'm sober," Clay said, and smiled.

"I want to talk this over with you," Amon said. "There comes a time when a man has to unburden himself. I've got to come to a decision now, and I want to know what you think about it, boy." There was a long silence, and Clay watched a firefly drift across his vision, alighting in a phosphorescent gleam on the porch. Amon's breathing was audible. "Clay, at one time I had a lot of property in this county," he said. "Besides this ranch and the house in Rutherford and the bungalows, I owned the furniture factory and a grist mill and a building on the square. My credit was good at the bank for a hundred thousand dollars any time I wanted to go in there and ask it.

— They told me that, Clay, once when I was planning to buy a ranch in Jack County. It had a herd of spotted horses, Clay, you would have liked. — I was Senator Hall and an important man in this part of the world. I was a big frog in a little puddle, all right, but the puddle has dried up. That about explains it. I didn't see for a long time what was happening, though. I thought conditions would improve. I thought the price of my stocks would go up, and Clay, I mortgaged property to buy that stock, property I'd worked years to accumulate. — I traded it off for some shiny gold paper like a fool investing in a wildcat well, like your father did back in the oil boom, Clay. I never could forgive him that, but now I see the worry he went through. That's what killed him, Clay, more than that Spanish bug. — Of course I've seen hard times before. I came to Texas and got my start in the midst of the big depression of the seventies. But that wasn't like this one. There was panic, yes, and despair, but there wasn't that feeling of waiting for everything to crumble, waiting like a fatalist knowing the worst was going to happen." He turned his sharp eyes to Clay, trying to make out his face in the darkness. "Boy, that's why I didn't run this fellow Upton off the ranch. That's why I let him stay here and make himself free of my provisions. He saw everything he had blow away and it licked him. He didn't know what to do with himself." Amon moved his shoulders against the back of his chair. "I know about how that man feels. I know what he's been through. — I tell you, I don't know what's going to happen next. I don't know what to do."

Clay waited in silence for his grandfather to continue, and after a pause Amon said : "Young lady, will you bring me a glass of buttermilk ? I haven't had any supper yet."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Hilda said, and she felt really contrite. She went into the house and lit a lamp and the light fell diffused upon Amon's face.

"Well, Clay," the old man said, "what should I do ? I've been thinking I ought to find a buyer for that herd right away and salvage what I can before things get worse. I'd have to take a loss of fifteen or twenty dollars a head, I imagine."

"But can't you hold out a little longer, Senator?"

"Hold out? No, Clay. I'm at the end of my rope. — I don't know whether you guessed it, but I'm stony broke, boy."

"I thought that was it," Clay said slowly.

"You did?" Amon frowned, and looked up at the stars. "Well, I didn't know whether you'd guessed it. But I appreciate it you never spoke of it, Clay. I didn't know whether you altogether understood."

"But I don't understand how it happened," Clay said. "I always thought of you as someone impregnable, Senator."

"Oh, one thing and another caused it, Clay. It was progressive. Bad investments — in copper, in those bridge bonds. I thought that the ranch would pull me through. I was counting on it, Clay."

"But how about those bungalows in Rutherford, the land you own? All that."

"Clay, I put a mortgage on everything I own," Amon said quietly. "All but that old yellow house that burned down, and that was my homestead property. You can't mortgage your homestead here in Texas. I reckon you know that." He looked at Clay closely. "And the ranch is mortgaged, too."

"Olivia told me that," Clay said. "But, Senator, why don't you wait a little longer? There may be rain. There may be winter grass."

"There's not enough feed to last a week, Clay. I tell you, I haven't got any cash money. All along I've been trying to get my hands on some cash money. I mortgaged the ranch for as much as it would stand to help buy the herd, and if the bank hadn't carried me for fifty per cent I couldn't have bought it anyhow. — No use putting more hay on a broken wagon, Clay." He stared straight ahead of him. "No, the best thing is to sell the cattle. It's a good herd of beef stock, Clay. I knew what I was about when I picked that herd out. I won't get a good price, but it could be worse." He leaned forward, with his hands on his knees. "And when it's sold I won't need you any longer, Clay. You can go away with your wife."

Hilda had come to the door with a glass of buttermilk and

Amon took it from her without looking up. She put the glass in his hands and his fingers closed around it. "I guess you understand, Clay, why I couldn't make it up to you — Olivia's money, I mean. You see why I couldn't pay it back?"

"I understood that," Clay said, and after a pause, in a thoughtful tone: "Senator, you were always a strict man. You wouldn't bend an inch. But you were never petty before."

"Petty!" Amon cried. "Why, young man . . ." He sat very straight for a moment, then slumped in his seat. "Petty? Well, I never thought of that. I didn't think I looked that way to you."

"Oh, I understood it," Clay said. "At least I began to — after you were so upset about that mule dying."

"That was a fine animal," Amon said. "I hated to lose that mule. — I tell you, Clay, I've been dogged by misfortune." He sighed. "Well, I reckon I won't need that spare part for the pump, anyhow."

It was hard for Clay to realize that the old man was no longer a potent force in his life. He now saw very clearly the past few months. "You always seemed to me to be a power that would never fail," he said. "I was afraid of you, Senator. But since I've come back to Texas, well — I knew you needed me here for some reason and I'd never seen you look for support to anyone before, even moral support. — Senator, you've always wanted a son you could be proud of, who could take your place, and you wanted me to supply that need, too. Maybe I would be able to, but not in the way you planned. You have to let me choose my own path." He looked up at the old man. Amon's eyes were almost closed and his head was bent. "Isn't that true?"

"Eh, Clay?" Amon looked up at him in a startled manner, then turned his eyes away. "Yes, I guess I am sort of proud of you, Clay." He cleared his throat. "You've been a help to me. You've done what you could, without a word of complaint. I don't know what more I could ask."

This was the finest praise Clay had ever received from his grandfather, and he felt a peculiar warm satisfaction, a sudden

deep affection for the blundering, emotionally inarticulate old man. Amon, looking at the stars, was surprised at Clay's perspicacity and admitted then to himself that it was true he had always wanted a son in the mould of his own choice. Then he turned abruptly to Clay. "I suppose what you mean by that, Clay, is that you're going away, too?"

"Yes," Clay said.

Amon sighed and shook his head, and after some time, when Clay thought he might have fallen into a doze, he said: "Perhaps that's best. You have your own way to make in the world. And I've thought sometimes that perhaps it's just as well about Olivia, Clay. She was not a happy woman, and I would have disliked telling her about this. I tried hard to keep it from her." Amon was thinking of the years when he had disciplined Olivia as severely as a schoolmaster, of the years of doubt and suspicion. To have weakened himself in her eyes would have been the final blow to his self-confidence. "I don't think she ever guessed, do you, Clay?"

"No," Clay said softly.

"Any more than your wife did," Amon said in a stronger voice.

"She didn't understand," Clay said. He got up and went into the kitchen where Hilda was preparing supper. "You heard all that, didn't you?"

She nodded.

"I knew in a way what was going on, and I've been sorry for him, even at his worst," Clay said. "Now you see why he didn't have heat in his house all last winter. That's why he always turned off the lights. That's why he held out money on Melvin and stripped the garden every time he came out here. He was clinging to every penny. He was going broke and scared as hell about it. Why, it's plain as day now. Cash money, that's all he could think of, cash money. He had to get his hands on some cash money. Every little thing, every damned penny, got important to him and his proportions got all mixed up, just as ours did. Don't you see?"

"It explains a lot," Hilda said.

"Of course it does. And he did his damnedest to keep it from us. It's pathetic. He's been a strong man all his life, the master in his house. He didn't want Olivia to find out, or me." Clay sighed. "I have a terribly empty feeling now. It's hard to explain. That old man has always been the one absolute, the definite concrete measure in my life — the hitch-rail of my Pegasus. Something always to come back to. Really, Hilda, I suddenly feel like an orphan. It's strange."

"You're being weaned," Hilda said bluntly.

"I suppose it is as simple as that. But it's been rather painful." He looked at her. "Painful for all of us."

xviii

THERE was a sense of mass and order in the dusty red backs close-packed in the lane as the cattle followed the plains road toward Briar Forks. Hilda and Amon had started out ahead in the car and Clay rode with Melvin and Upton behind the herd ; the three indifferent mounts with their nondescript saddle blankets and harness-scarred shoulders jogged wearily along in a slight breeze cooled by distant rains. Occasional cloud shadows swept across the prairie ; it was the first day in which there was real relief from the heat, in which the weather was that of a normal summer day and not the dry burning breath of the drouth. Behind them as they rode eastward were the bare brown acres of the ranch, seared of grass and now empty of the gaunt cattle which had grouped in the scanty shade near the water tanks for so long. The fence posts strung with dazzling barbed wire in the sunlight were sunk in bare ground and around them the eddies of the wind had traced whorls of dust.

Upton was mounted on the windbroken bay horse. He rode between Clay and Melvin and he was the only one who talked on the ride to the railroad. Clay was silent, still in the mood of unrest that had disturbed him for the past few busy days. Amon had visibly slacked his hands on the reins, and it was Clay who had showed the herd to the buyer and superintended arrangements for shipment. Melvin listened, with a worried

frown on his angular face, while Upton chewed tobacco and spat brown juice at the rumps of the steers ahead of him and talked in the manner of a man to whom silence was intolerable.

"Have you-all seen this stuff about California?" he asked. "It looks like California's the place, all right. I've been thinking some about it. You know, they're giving away money out yonder, Melvin. That's what they say, anyhow. They're going to end poverty in California, they say."

"Is that right?" Melvin said tonelessly, politely.

"I ain't sure how they aim to go about it. They got some kind of a plan to put men in the factories and start 'em smoking, and put men on the farms and let 'em plant. Then they can trade back and forth what they got. Sounds all right. Sounds like t'ought to work out. They got the land there, and all you got to do is plant it, and crops grow fine out yonder. Everybody knows that. Ain't no drouths nor dust to plague a man, neither. I tell you, I don't see nothing wrong with it. I don't see how it can miss." Upton let out a shrill yell that sent a lagging yearling scrambling forward into the herd. He grinned. "I done talked it over with the missus and by God, I think we'll head out California way. Ain't nothing to stop us. Ain't nothing to hold us here in Texas." He glanced at Melvin. "You ought to come along with us, you and Blossom, and git next to some of that free money, Melvin. You got your car, and I aim to sell off my wagon and team and pick me up some sort of an auto, I reckon. We'll all drive out yonder together. What do you say, young feller?"

"I guess not," Melvin said, with a shake of his head. "We'll stay here on the ranch, I reckon."

They were near town then and Clay rode ahead, pressing his dun horse along between the cattle and the fence until he was ahead of the herd. He rode on across the railroad tracks and waited to turn the cattle upon the road that led to the siding. Amon waited at the loading corral, and he opened the gate and stood beside it while they drove the herd into the corral.

Later, while they were working in the dust of the corral, goading the steers up a runway into the cattle-cars, Upton was

still talking to Melvin about California, saying : "You ought to come with us, I tell you."

"Well, I don't know," Melvin said, wiping sweat from his face with a bandana handkerchief. "I reckon Texas is the place for me. Things can't git no worse here."

Clay told him then, "The Senator is going to sell the ranch, Melvin, as soon as he can find a buyer."

Melvin's mouth opened. He leaned against the fence and ran his hand over his chin. "But what's he goin' to do that fer, Clay ? Say, I thought he'd always keep this ranch. What's he got in mind, Clay ?"

"You know how it's been. He's losing money on it."

"But it's that way with everybody. This has been a bad year. — But maybe the next feller will keep me on here, Clay, if he does sell out. What do you think ? Do you reckon he will, Clay ?"

"Why, sure," Clay said.

"I'll wait around and see, anyhow. I don't see no sense in going off to California on a chance, do you ?" Melvin shook his head and turned away.

When the cattle were loaded they all ate together at the café near the station which the butcher's wife operated. There was one long table, solid as a butcher's block, and bleached and smooth from years of scouring. For Melvin and Upton the chicken-fried steak, cooked in a batter in the manner of fried chicken, and served with frijoles and mashed potatoes, was something of a feast. Clay sat beside Hilda, facing a window through which he could see the red ribs of the full cattle-cars, the sheen of sunlight on metal, on the bare prairie beyond. They could hear the cattle lowing.

Amon was at the head of the table, and a shaft of sunlight from the window fell on his bent head. He hardly looked up from his plate during the meal and Hilda felt a sympathy for the old man that had been impossible to her before. She had judged him too severely, she thought ; she realized that she had centered upon him as a tangible symbol the whole of her indignation ; he had personified the wrongs of the entire social sys-

tem for her. Now she saw him as a very old man, not a symbol of power that she hated. His face was lined and gray. His eyes were lustreless and today had a peculiar shifting quality ; he avoided meeting any glance of another. He sat drawn within himself, silent, very plainly thinking of the long years of his life which had culminated in this moment of impotence. Hilda tried to imagine him as a young man. The slight slant of his eyes beneath thick eyebrows would have been attractive ; his nose would not have had that bulbous red appearance, but would have been straight and strongly carved like Clay's. But now the contours of youth were lost in the creased mould of an old gray face. He had never seemed so old and helpless before, and Hilda felt that he had lived beyond his time ; his spirit had carried him on in spite of a failing body. It was hard to realize that as a boy his immediate environment had been a slave-holding plantation in Tennessee, that he had lived to see the world change so much, that between boyhood and old age his life had spanned so great a transformation. When they were driving to town together he had said to her : "Well, young lady, so you're anxious to get away. I can understand that. You want to go out and begin life. Yes, I can understand it. We have this in common, you and Clay and I. We matured in a depression period ; we had to look afield for something to do. I came to Texas and you want to go away from Texas, and both for the same reason. Ain't that right ?" It had almost seemed that the hard times of the seventies and the depression of the thirties were the same in his mind, an identical measuring-rule to apply. "My father didn't want me to go away," he had said, "but I went. I guess it's only fitting that Clay should feel the same way. But I'll miss him here. And I'm sorry to see you leave too, Hilda."

The butcher's wife, in a gray denim frock, her angular face stamped with the harassed expression of years of tried patience, passed around the table with plates of lumpy biscuits as large as her fist, with deep dishes of frijoles and potatoes, and once the butcher came into the small café room to say : "Shipping your herd, are you, Senator Hall ?" Amon glanced up with his

eyebrows momentarily raised and the smile that came to his face was only a nervous tension of the muscles of his cheeks. The butcher said : "I went down to look 'em over. They come through the drouth pretty good, Senator, all things considered. Have to take a loss, did you ?"

"Yes," Amon said. A month ago he would have been angered by the man's curiosity. "I took a small loss." He looked over at Clay then, and the smile became more pronounced ; his expression was that of relief. He took a deep breath that squared his shoulders slightly, then he leaned over and chose a toothpick from a small enamel shoe that stood on the table beside the tobasco sauce and a glass cruet. He sat back and surveyed the table over which they were all bent in eating ; Melvin silent and absorbed, Upton eating greedily with the look in his eyes of a man who had dreamed long of good meals while eating salt pork and beans. "Melvin," Amon said, and waited until Melvin's faded blue eyes turned up to him. "Melvin, I'll never stock that ranch again. No, I'll never raise another herd of cattle." Melvin waited, with his fork poised above his plate. "I'm an old man now," Amon said. "I'm eighty-four years old, near eighty-five, and it's high time I retired. I'm going to get rid of the ranch."

"Clay let on you might sell it," Melvin said.

"But you'll be taken care of, Melvin," Amon said quickly. "I'll do the best I can for you."

"That's kind of you, Senator."

"Well, I promised you that, and it's no more than right." Amon glanced at Hilda ; he met her eyes steadily, with a certain defiance, a certain pride. "You don't need to worry," he said. "You've got your life before you, Melvin." He chewed reflectively on the toothpick, gathering together the ends of his thoughts, striving for a rationalization. "I reckon you know the story, Melvin. It was back in the seventies that I bought that ranch and started breeding good cattle, the first in the county. Your grandfather was a fine cattleman. He was a dirt farmer, but he turned cattleman overnight, and a good one. I tell you, during the early eighties, when range values boomed,

we made a good thing of it. And we got through the hard times of '86 all right, too. Over the years that ranch has paid, and I reckon it can be made to pay again. The price of prime beef will go up after this drouth is over ; that's bound to come. And somebody with energy, somebody young and active, somebody with capital, will reap a harvest, I expect. But I'm an old man, and I've lived through enough of it. It's time for me to retire, and I'm going to find a buyer for the ranch as soon as I can. — But I'll see what can be done for you, Melvin. There's no reason why you shouldn't stay on that land, whoever owns it."

"I'd like to stay on there," Melvin said anxiously. "I shore would."

Amon pushed back his chair and got up from the table, and when they left the café later they found him sitting in the car gazing at the stock cars on the railroad siding. Hilda drove him back to the ranch, and Clay rode with Upton and Melvin, their horses pacing along the road in the cooler air of afternoon, with the sun slanting into their faces.

"I stopped yonder at the garage, Melvin," Upton said. "It looks like I can make the trade of my wagon and team for an auto and a little spare cash to buy gasoline, too. And I ought to git a few dollars fer that old cow, don't you think ? Feller's coming out tomorrow to look my outfit over." He glanced across at Melvin, turning in his saddle with one lanky leg swung across the pommel. "You ought to listen to me, Melvin. Come on out west to California. We can settle on some of that fallow land yonder — it's just laying idle in the year-round sun — and we'll raise us oranges and grapefruit and things like that."

"I reckon not." Melvin said, without turning his face from the western sky. "I'll wait here to see what happens, fer a while anyhow. I reckon if the Senator puts in a word fer me, like he said, things will come out right."

When they reached the ranch Melvin went into the log house where Blossom was waiting. He saw her anxious face. "Aw now, gal, there ain't a thing to fret about." He hung his hat on a peg. "The Senator aims to sell the ranch out, lock, stock and barrel, but he said he'd put in a word fer me, now."

"He aims to sell fer sure, Melvin ?"

"Soon as he can. But he'll put in a word fer me, he said. I reckon we can stay on here, Blossom."

"I wish we knowed fer certain. I hate to just set here and wait. It scares me, Melvin. It scares me to look at Louise and not know if we'll have a bed to lay her in come a month from now."

"About all we can do is wait, Blossom. He'll sell the ranch, he said, and he's the captain."

"But what if this next feller don't want to keep us here ? He might want somebody of his own choosing."

"We got to take that chance." Melvin sat down by the table. "But I'm a good farmer, Blossom. My corn was the best in the county before the south winds burned it up. Everybody said it was. And Senator Hall is a powerful man. I reckon they'll listen to what he says." Blossom sighed and went to get him a glass of buttermilk, wanting something to do. He took the glass and looked up at her. "It's shore hard, gal, it is that. It's hard to live all your life on a piece of land and farm it and make things grow on it and never have a clod of it you could call your own. I hate to live that way all my life, and my sons after me — and Louise. I'd like to have something some time that I could feel was permanent, Blossom. I wish I knowed of some way to bring that about, but I don't. I don't see no way clear. All we can do, I reckon, is to wait and see what happens."

"Wait and see, wait and see." Blossom bent her head on her hands and sobbed. "Melvin, we got to *do* something. We can't always wait and see. We can't!"

Melvin looked at her bowed head and swallowed. He clenched his big red hands together, rubbing the knuckles with his fingers. He pressed his hands together to feel their wiry strength and he thought that there was nothing he could do with them ; no plow-handles to grip, no hoe to swing. He reached out to stroke her head and he felt her fine hair against the callouses on his palm.

Amon sat for a long time on the piazza of the ranch-house

that afternoon, looking out at the desolate pastures of the ranch. He heard Hilda's heels ringing on the floor inside as she went about packing her things. There was an air of activity, of fugacity, that disturbed him, and after a while he got up and walked away from the house, out over the bare ground toward the barn. He leaned against the corral fence, chewing on a straw. To the hilled horizon all around him the land had belonged to him for more than half a century. He had seen it in every season, in every dress of nature from the bright green cloak of spring to the shabby sackcloth of summer drouth. Now the plains were bare ; the windmill towers were stark and solitary. The valley of Briar Creek was an empty cup, dry and depleted, and it depressed Amon to look at the burned land, to see moving in single file a half a mile away the three saddle-sore horses, released from the corral. The log house where Blossom and Melvin were seemed deserted ; there was no smoke from the chimney and the afternoon sun was reflected blankly back at him from the window-panes. Under the trees of the creek bottom he could see the white canvas of the Uptons' wagon. On sudden impulse Amon turned toward the pecan trees of the creek, looking as he went at the dry faded leaves rustling like spectres of autumn on the branches. He went along the path atop the bluff and down to the flat ground where the wagon stood. Clay was there too, talking to Upton, and Amon went toward them. Upton was helping his wife make a bundle of their effects, spreading them in a pile on a blanket. He glanced up at Amon and grinned. "Fixin' to leave, Senator," he said. "Ought to git started by tomorrow or the next day."

"So ?" Amon said. "Look here, you don't need to be in any hurry."

"How's that ?"

"I suppose you can stay on here as long as you want — until the ranch is sold, if you like."

"Not me. We got to be on our way. Thank you, though. Ain't nothing to hold me here. I'm headin' out California way, Senator, to get my share of that free money."

"Free money ?" Amon said.

"Well, free land, anyhow. Expect to have an auto by tomorrow and I'll git started on my way."

"Everybody seems to want to be on the move," Amon said, glancing at Clay. He leaned against the trunk of a tree, then pushed himself away from it with a nervous shove of his shoulders. "Boy, I want to talk to you." He turned back toward the bluff and Clay followed him. Amon climbed the steep path and paused out of breath on the bluff, looking down at the dry white gravel of the creek. "When are you two going away?"

"As soon as we can, Senator. When you don't need me any longer." Amon glanced at Clay, a shifting glance. Thinking of the old man as solitary and dispirited Clay said apologetically : "You see, we both want to get our lives arranged. We can't go on marking time here."

"I understand," Amon said. He walked on slowly, and when they came into the ranch yard he looked around him at the windmill and the water tank, at the bare barn where the red paint was chipped and faded. He said with a lift in his voice : "How long will it take us to get our things together ? We'd better go into town, Clay, as soon as possible. Yes, today." He turned his gray, sagging face to Clay. "I don't feel that I want to stay out here another night," he said.

"I guess we can get ready in time," Clay said.

"I've got only a toothbrush and a suit of clothes to pack. I'm not burdened down with property now." Amon chuckled. "But, Clay, I'll have some equity left in this ranch, and in those bungalows in town, too, if I can sell them. When it's all over I'll have a little money, enough to live on, and enough to help you out, too. At least I hope so. I'd like to grub-stake you and your wife, Clay."

"Oh, we'll get along," Clay said, and he put his hand on his grandfather's shoulder as they walked toward the house.

"But I want to pay you," Amon said. "You came down here and worked hard for me, Clay. You did the best you could, and I appreciate it. You ought to get something for it. That's only fair."

Clay left it at that. He went to Hilda in the bedroom.

"Well, we're going to Rutherford this afternoon. He wants to. It's plain that it makes him unhappy to stay any longer out here." Then he went to the barn and crated his canvases ; he helped Hilda pack the suitcases and strap them shut. It was only an hour before sunset then, and while she prepared supper he packed the suitcases in the car. Melvin came out to help him. "Are you fixin' to leave, Clay ?"

"Yes, we're on our way. Bound for New York, Melvin."

"You and the missus ?"

"That's right."

"Well !" Melvin said. He sat down on the running board. "And how about the Senator, Clay ? What does he aim to do ?"

"He's going to live in Rutherford."

"He'll leave the ranch then ?"

"Tonight," Clay said.

"Well, things happen fast," Melvin said. "Don't they ?" He got to his feet and walked away toward the log house.

It was twilight when they were ready to leave. The sun had set in the same explosive color that had closed each day of the drouth with mocking beauty, and in the dusk Melvin and Blossom and the Uptons were still solid figures bathed in amber light as they stood beside the white picket fence. The Colemans were self-conscious and stumbled on their homely words of farewell, and Hilda remembered Blossom's wide anxious eyes as they drove away. She looked back once after the car had turned through the gate upon the road and saw the four of them still standing by the white fence ; Melvin waiting now in an agony of uncertainty, Upton lean and gaunt and smiling, preparing to start out with his thin silent wife in a relic of an automobile for the long drive to California, to a promised land where police would be waiting at the state line to turn them back.

No one talked on the drive to town, and when they reached the bungalow Amon sat down in a chair in the living room while Clay and Hilda carried in the baggage. The house was airless and Hilda went to open the windows. Clay turned on the lights and Amon looked around him at the small, stiffly-furnished

room. "I can't live here, Clay," he said. "I think I'll go to a hotel after you and your wife have gone."

"But you'd be more comfortable here, Senator."

"No, Clay. I don't want to set up house for myself alone. I think I'll take a room in the Paladora Hotel. It's just across the street from the courthouse and I can walk over every day and hear the cases. I'll be near my old friends there, and I'll know what's going on in the town. All I want is a room and a bed and a radio to listen to evenings. And maybe I'll get a nigger to come in and cook for me. Yes, I'll be comfortable there, Clay." He stood up, with a shake of his head. "Now I think I'll go straight to bed. This has been a tiring day for me."

Amon went into the bathroom to undress while Hilda opened the windows to air his bedroom. Later he went past her in his nightshirt under the yellow hall light, feeling his way along the wall like a blind man, and she heard his great sigh as he sank to the bed. Downstairs Clay had piled their luggage in the hall. He was still in the overalls and boots of his ranch costume and his boots left dust-tracks on the floor.

"So it's all over now," he said. "I'm beginning to feel better. I'll be glad when we're on our way."

"So will I."

"Too much has happened here. It's been difficult." He looked at her. "I suppose I've been too emotionally involved, but I'm getting the cobwebs out of my head now. I came to the point of realizing that I could never accomplish what I willed to accomplish and now I'm getting my ego adjusted to reality. I suppose the Senator has always been my potential Maecenas in my mind. That was one reason I wanted to come back to Texas, and that was why it was difficult to accept the truth of what was happening. Well, that's over now, and I'm free."

"But there's no Maecenas, Clay."

"No, and I don't need one." He stood up. "I suppose I'll have to be a Sunday painter, like Douanier Rousseau. Our first problem will be just how we're going to keep alive."

"I'm not worried about that."

"Nor am I. But painting is a luxury in this world. I'll have to remember that. An artist hasn't much chance to lead a normal life. — But I'm going to paint. That will always be my chief objective, and nothing will stop me, Hilda. I need it. I realize that now more than ever. — When I came down here and quit painting for a while I was lost. Then I thought that painting had only been my escape, and it was, partly. The changes I made in my form of expression was partly escapism. — But when I gave painting up I had nothing to replace it, and I suppose that's why I was in such a strange state. Well, that's over now."

The next morning Amon descended the stairs with a smile, and at the breakfast table he said with a certain eagerness : "Clay, I want to go downtown right away. Do you suppose you could drive me to the hotel ? I'm going to find a place to live, and I want to put this house up for sale or rent — right away before the first of the month comes around. I want to get what I can out of it."

He sat quietly at Clay's side on the drive to the square, but when Clay stopped at the curb in front of the hotel the old man pushed the door open and went ahead of Clay across the sidewalk. The lobby of the hotel was bare and dim, with the half-lights of brass spittoons winking in the corners. "This is where the old Clayton & Lord House used to stand," Amon said. "It was a fine hotel in its day. I came here when I first got to Rutherford, when your great-grandfather was running it, and here's where I met your grandmother, Clay. Well, that shows how time has gone by. I think of things that seem so recent, but they were before your time." He walked across to the clerk's booth. He knew the clerk by name and said : "Jim, you remember my grandson, Clayton Hall. This is young Jim Lord."

"Sure, I know Clay," Jim Lord said, reaching out his hand.

Amon stood erect by the counter, saying : "I thought I might come and stay with you, Jim. Have you got room for me ?"

"Sure thing, Senator. For tonight ?"

"For every night." Amon smiled. "I'm going to live here.

All I need is a quiet room with space for my books. I want to be able to look out at the square. Can you fix that up?"

"I don't see why not. Come along, you-all."

He showed them rooms on the third floor, and Amon chose a small suite; a tiny bedroom connecting with a somewhat larger living room. He stood in the middle of the room, which had casement windows overlooking the square. "I thought I'd get a nigger to come in and cook for me," he said, looking out at the courthouse.

"Say, we've got a dining room here, Senator. We set a good table."

"No, I'd rather have a nigger come in. I'm an old man now. I tell you, I've earned my solitude."

"O.K., Senator," Jim Lord said with a tolerant, amused air. "I'll have a stove put in for you."

"I'll take it then," Amon said. "You can expect me in a day or so. Thank you, Jim."

Jim Lord went away and the old man looked at Clay with a smile. "I'll be well off here, Clay. I'll have my bookcases and law books moved in and they'll just about fill the wall space here. I'll have a big roll-top desk put in the middle of the room here, like an office. Just like a law office. Why, I might even hang my shingle out again. What do you think?" He chuckled and rubbed his hands together. "It will be pleasant not to have any cares or worries to concern me. I'll have enough money to live on, and I'll be able to go to court every day. I'll have enough to occupy my mind." He straightened his shoulders and turned to Clay, his eyes narrowed. "But there's one last thing I'm going to do, Clay. I'll go on with that suit against the copper company. I'll pester and harass them, I tell you, until I win my case. Those big companies have sucked up everything in sight, like a vacuum cleaner. They've sucked everything out of the hands of the smaller men like me, Clay. But I'm going to get to work and get that money back." He struck one clenched fist against his palm. "I haven't given up yet, Clay, you hear?"

XIX

As the Texas and Pacific train moved through the piney woods of East Texas, past fleeting glimpses of oil derricks resting on red clay flats, the trees were a dark green stain, the soil a deeper pigment, because of the strong steady rain that swept at last over Texas from the high Staked Plains to the Gulf of Mexico. To Clay it seemed an omen, that rain had come at last. The rain drew a shimmering curtain over Texas and what had passed there and he felt that when it lifted there would be a new horizon. But he could not help thinking of his grandfather, remembering the last day when they had transferred his belongings to the hotel. There had been few of the old man's effects to move, his clothing and his law books only ; his trophies, his other tangible associations with the past, had burned with the old yellow house. There had been a gentle simplicity in Amon's manner ; he had relied on Clay, let Clay arrange to have the radio installed and his belongings moved. He had come to the train to see them off, and Clay remembered him standing on the cinder platform in the gray light of overcast skies. He had held Clay's hand a long time in farewell. He had offered to help the porter carry one of the suitcases, in a nervous state of needing activity, and as they got on the train he said : "Well, good luck. Good luck in New York. I want to hear from you, Clay. We're the only ones left now."

Clay remembered the flat tone of the old man's voice. He remembered his eyes, squinted to small points in the creases of his face, and the pressure of his unsteady hand. Sitting with Hilda in the snug compartment, looking out at the driving rain in the piney woods, he was depressed. Turning to her, he said : "I hated to leave him there alone, when now for the first time in his life he really needs someone."

She looked at him steadily, with her mouth twisted as she bit the corner of her lip. "Just how important is your loyalty, Clay ? That's the really basic question. I know how you feel about it. Of course he's pathetic now. But how much do

we owe to the warmed-over emotions of the past? The way I feel is that it has no claim on me whatsoever. I'm free, and I want to work out my life for myself, some sort of life that I can guide in the way I want it, as best I can."

"Yes, of course," Clay said. "Yes, I feel free too. It's only a last regret, a sentimental hangover."

"I said the other day that you were being weaned." She smiled. "Well, that's true. We're orphans now, Clay. We're part of an orphan class. There are people like us all over America and we continue our loyalties, to tradition, to custom, in just the way you do to your grandfather. It's a sentimental hangover, or it's based on fear or doubt or cowardice and a thousand intangible habit associations. Actually, we have no true loyalty. Isn't that so?"

"I wasn't discussing the social system," Clay said quietly. "Only an old man."

"An old man who was a power all his life, who controlled and oppressed people by his power." Hilda put her hand in his. "We're not going to fight any more, Clay. I admit it was partly my fault before. But I was there impartially and I could see more clearly what was going on. I know it was futile to oppose him, to try and play Lady Bountiful to the Colemans, but I had to do something.—Clay, I have a very clear idea of what going back to New York means to me. I don't want to work just to make a living, only to have a home. I want to work for something I can feel. Amon Hall was only a fraction of the wider force that we have to combat, and I want to fight. I'm more interested in people than you are, I suppose, and I haven't the same sentimental wishful attitude I used to have. A lot of things have knocked that out of me. I'm going to work now with the only class that offers us any hope for the future. That's what going back to New York means to me, Clay."

Clay turned his head to the window, and still he thought of his grandfather, picturing him in his mind in the light of what he knew of him and what he had heard from boyhood. As a young man Amon had been driven by the great depression of the seventies to search out new horizons in the days when the

nation was still sprawling westward and opportunity seemed limitless. He had dedicated his life to his ambition, and every other value had been secondary to him. He had worked hard, and largely through his efforts the wheels of machinery had begun to turn in Paladora County, had speeded faster as the century passed. His life had spanned the alpha and omega of the modern industrial system and his decline was the decline of the whole. He had been the chrysalis of transition, which Clay was to discard, and in Clay now the cycle was continued, sixty years later, in a world where individual opportunity was becoming ever more rapidly an anachronism. But the chrysalis-case had been discarded and he felt unfettered ; there was no link with the past to chain him. He sat looking out at the flat wet landscape with a marvelous sense of freedom, with youthful expectancy, as the train rushed on toward the Red River and the borderline of Texas. Looking out the window at the steady leaden rain Clay waited for the clouds to break and the sun to shine down on a new landscape.

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